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PARTISAN REVIEW, published quarterly in Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall by Partisan Review, Inc., is at Boston University, 236 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215. (617) 353-4260. Subscriptions $18.00 a year, $33.00 for two years, $47.00 for three years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $21.00 a year, $36.00 for two years; institutions, $28.00 for one year. All payments from foreign countries must be made U.S. money order or checks payable in U.S. currency. Prepaid single issue $5.00, anniversary issue $8.00. Add $1.00 per issue for postage and handling. US ISSN 0031-2525.
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Distributed in the U.S.A. by DeBoer, Nutley, NJ 07710, Capitol News, Boston 02120. L-S Distribution, San Francisco 94109, Ingram Periodicals, Nashville 37217. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.
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1989
VOLUME LVI NUMBER 4

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS

Library
Hamilton State College
NOV 6 1989

COMMENT

William Phillips 531

ISRAEL: JUNE 1989

William Phillips — *Then and Now: '68 and '88* — 541

Edith Kurzweil — *From Wall to Wall* — 537

William Phillips and Edith Kurzweil — *An Interview with Teddy Kollek* — 544

ARTICLES

Amos Oz — *Strong Nerves and German Irony* — 552
They Were Definitey Created in God's Image — 557

Craig Calhoun — *Protest in Beijing: The Conditions and Importance of the Chinese Student Movement* — 563

Tsvetan Todorov — *The Deflection of the Enlightenment* — 581

Robert Alter — *On S. Y. Agnon* — 620

Herbert Gold — *Selfish Like Me* — 632

Jed Perl — *Seeing Mapplethorpe* — 647

FICTION

Alan Lelchuk — *Adventures of a Fiction Boy* — 593

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

Paul Hollander	*The Fellow Travellers* by David Caute	655
Eugene Goodheart	*The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* by Ernest Bloch	662
Fred Siegel	*The Radical Renewal: The Politics of Ideas in America* by Norman Birnbaum	666
John Burt	*The Arkansas Testament* by Derek Walcott	669
Bonnie Costello	*A Hunger* by Lucie Brock-Broido *The Good Thief* by Marie Howe	672
Kathryn Hellerstein	*Happy Hour* by Alan Shapiro *Sapphics Against Anger and Other Poems* by Timothy Steele *The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth	678
Wyn Kelley	*Rope-Dancer* by M. J. Fitzgerald *Concertina* by M. J. Fitzgerald *Anywhere But Here* by Mona Simpson *Second Sight* by Mary Tannen	648

LETTERS 689

INDEX 692

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COMMENT

In the Emersonian sense of the term, Sidney Hook was a representative man. And with his passing, we have lost someone who perhaps was most representative of the gifted and productive liberal anticommunist community of intellectuals in the thirties and forties. Indeed, he was one of the boldest and most sagacious of the political leaders of the community.

To be sure, we had our disagreements with him. In fact, the anticommunist community was full of disagreements and splits, at times violent and acrimonious. Some thought that Sidney Hook was too obsessive, almost too dedicated; he couldn't let go of an issue. Yet if it were not for his intellectual force and his relentlessness in pursuing the cause of freedom and antitotalitarianism, maybe we would have faltered. He represented the community at its highest levels of intensity.

In essence, Hook was a teacher who had gone public. And he was a consecrated teacher, a secular rabbi–one of the unacknowledged great teachers of our time. As a graduate student at New York University in the thirties, I took Hook's courses in medieval and contemporary philosophy, and courses on Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, among others. What mostly animated the courses was Hook's ability to cut through the texts of these figures in order to locate their thinking in a broad philosophical and historical context. His method was essentially Socratic. He constantly raised provocative questions. He argued with students and encouraged them to argue with him. Delmore Schwartz, who was also a student of his, a favorite one, told the story of Hook's illustrating Aristotle's view of immanent development by saying that only an acorn could become an oak tree, to which Schwartz, himself a great intellectual arguer, replied that only a pig could become a ham sandwich. You can imagine what kind of debate followed. As a pedagogic device, Hook played the devil's advocate in class: if most of the students were atheists he argued for the existence of God; if they were believers, he argued the reverse. He was not just an enthusiastic teacher–there are no lack of those–he also had one of the clearest and sharpest minds of his generation, honed in the classrooms of Morris R. Cohen and John Dewey.

Unfortunately, he spent too little of his time on problems of philosophy and political philosophy, for which his talents should have destined him, and too much time exposing the Communists, which he might have left to lesser talents. Still, he must be credited with a major role in the political education of an entire community. First he taught the left how to read Marx. Then he was in the forefront of the ideological war against the Stalinists and the fel-

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low-travellers. He may have overdone this, but without his efforts the war might not have been fought so successfully. And more recently, when the left reappeared in a less authentic and recognizable form, Hook again was leading the battle, despite his age and failing health. Toward the end of his life he was active in exposing the educational shenanigans at Stanford University.

Even in private gatherings he never let up. He was always the pedagogue. One evening at my home at a small party for Arthur Koestler who had just arrived in this country, Hook tangled with Koestler. Koestler was known as one of the toughest opponents of the peace movements supported by the Communists. But on this occasion he was taken with Mary McCarthy and apparently thought he would impress her by defending Ghandi's neutralist and pacifist stance. Hook, who was oblivious to such devious and perverse behavior, responded as though he were in a seminar. He began to give Koestler a political lecture, but Koestler, who knew his politics as well as Hook, cut him off with a typically arrogant and rude Koestlerian answer: "I didn't come three thousand miles to hear this nonsense."

Because Hook was always embattled, he became a controversial figure, and even those who shared his general views felt there were a number of disputable statements in his recently published autobiography. Yet his large achievements overshadow these flaws. His death marks the passing of one of the last survivors of an earlier generation of intellectuals who transcended their special fields and have had a decisive influence on the thinking of the times.

*

Politics, as they say, used to make for strange bedfellows. However, in recent years politics has separated them.

The untimely death of Mike Harrington reminds us of the corrosive effect of politics on human relations, since the advent of Stalinism. We had our disagreements with Mike, but we always respected his openness and polemical vigor. Everyone liked Mike. Perhaps *glasnost,* which indicates that all of us were wrong in one way or another, that ideological stands are often dissolved by history, will restore a measure of civility to political and intellectual life. In any event, Mike will be missed as a radical spokesman and as a civilized opponent.

*

Donald Barthelme was a literary friend who also died young. We had differences, but they were literary, not political. He was a kind of minimalist, and I suppose we could be regarded as maximalists. But whatever one's relation to Barthelme, he will be remembered by everyone as a writer so dedicated to his idea of himself and his craft that he did not give in to

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popular pressures.

*

I agree with much of Jed Perl's comment on the Mapplethorpe and Serrano cases in this issue, but other aspects of the affair should be discussed.

Congress has been duly reprimanded for intervening in artistic matters. But little has been said about the other side of the case. To my knowledge, Helen Frankenthaler is one of the few who has not only criticized Congressional interference but also has publicly chided the National Endowment for the Arts for its culpabilities. Yet the fact is that the NEA provoked Congress by its espousal of projects that were bound to arouse the kind of response that followed. The last two incidents–Mapplethorpe and Serrano–were only the most flagrant. But NEA, like other agencies and institutions, has for years taken up some rather trendy–and sometimes shocking–enterprises.

The use of public funds is always a tricky and precarious matter. But it is not surprising that there should have been protests at supporting s-and-m photographs and one of the flag in urine. However, there is no question of censorship, for nobody argues they should not have been shown in a private gallery.

Moreover, the argument that these photographs represent the kind of rejection of convention that advanced art has always been noted for strikes me as questionable. For artistic breakthroughs have always been such as to advance the medium, not simply to introduce unconventional content. Nor does it appear that photographs verging on pornography or one with the flag in urine can be said to be advancing the medium.

However, if these are to be considered debatable esthetic questions, the photographs should by all means be given private showings, and art critics and artists could then argue about them.

There probably cannot be any fixed rule about what NEA should fund. Nevertheless,one irreducible criterion surely is that of quality, which can be defended against uninformed opinion. But if quality is not the criterion–as it often is not–then, as they say, anything goes, and trouble is bound to arise anywhere from public protest to Congressional interference.

To be sure, the judgement of quality is not easily arrived at, since it involves a consensus of professional opinion. Yet it does seem possible for the Endowment to avail itself of the views of the most respected writers, artists, and critics, rather than those of haphazard panelists, themselves committed to trendy ideas.

W. P.

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Israel: June 1989

William Phillips

THEN AND NOW: '68 AND '88

I have just returned from my second visit to Israel (with Edith Kurzweil). The first was in 1968, just after the triumphant Six-Day War. I found myself constantly comparing the two Israels, then and now. In fact, most of my observations have been comparative observations of everything from the food to the politics. Even the buildings seemed different because there were so many more of them. I am allergic to quickie journalism, but one feels so much at home in Israel, as though one were going back from the big city to the shtetl, that impressions during a stay of only a few weeks seem somehow to be legitimized. Anyway, here they are.

The mood: Despite the bustle and vitality of the Israelis, I could not help being saddened by the change in the mood of the people. In 1968, I was swept up by the euphoria following the rapid victory over the Arabs. The high spirits were exhilarating, even though one felt that they went too far, that they were bound to tumble. Obviously the political situation had changed, for the worse, and one felt a sense of yielding to fatalities. One thing had not changed: the unshakeable hostility of the Palestinians, except that it has become more violent. In 1968, I was taken to the West Bank to meet some local Israeli leaders. They lived in a small but comfortable cottage. We were served coffee and some exotic cakes. Conversation was civilized, until we came to the question of relations with the Israelis. Then they became aggressive, telling me that I had been brainwashed by Nixon. They also triumphantly showed me a document written by the American New Left, the gist of which was that Palestinian rights were being trampled by the Israelis. Their parting shot was that Israelis should go back to where they came from. When I asked where that was, they said, "Poland."

The expansion: Tel Aviv and Jerusalem seemed to be bigger, more crowded, more like world cities. More people, more traffic, more stores, more houses, more pollution. One tended to forget Israel's almost invisible problems, as they were dissolved in the carnival of daily life.

The shtetl look: Despite the phenomenal growth of the cities, there was still the small-town look. Most of the stores were dinky. There were few of the boutiques, the shops filled with the goods of the modern consumer societies that you see in New York, Paris, London, Berlin. The exceptions were

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the hotels. They were grand structures, with sumptuous interiors, that stood out. Also the houses were imposing in their sturdy, white simplicity, built out of stubby white stone. In fact, everything was white, apparently because all the rocks in Israel are white–or off-white.

We stayed at the Belgium House of the Hebrew University at Givat Ram, a guest house for foreign visitors, tucked away in one of the hills of Jerusalem. The campus has the magnificence of a large, rambling sanctuary, resembling a sprawling monastery, with wooded walks in all directions. There is a profusion of lush greenery–green being the symbolic color of the vegetation the Israelis brought to Israel. But one is surprised to find so few animals. I saw no squirrels, very few birds. Maybe they don't like Jewish cooking.

The food: Alas, the food at many restaurants has not improved very much. It is mostly basic Jewish food, but whittled down to its simplest elements: little variety, little imagination, little care. (I was reminded of English food, particularly after the Second World War. At that time, it was said that the French couldn't solve their problems because they were so concerned about food, while the British couldn't solve theirs because they weren't interested in food.) I found myself wondering why the food was so uninviting generally in Israel–except in a few homes and the posh restaurants. The only explanation I could come up with was that the Israelis were too absorbed in the problems of existing, in the questions of their future, to pay much attention to cuisine. What has been called a siege mentality may have little place for gourmet cooking.

Politics: The most important aspect of Israeli life, of course, is the political one. The *Intifada,* the question of how to deal with the Palestinians, the question of a Palestinian state–these problems are at the center of Israeli concerns. As we know from reports in the American press, the Israelis are divided between those who are almost reconciled to a Palestinian state and those who are resisting it.But opinions are not so black and while as Americans think. They are more varied and complex. Yet there is a general feeling that a Palestinian state is inevitable sometime in the near future. However, unlike Americans who find it easy to solve the problem because they have no stakes, very few except for the crazies on the left and the communists, are disposed simply to hand over the West Bank to the Palestinians without guarantees of security, though it is not apparent just what these will be.

One hears the slogan "land for peace," in Israel as well as in America. But it is very vague, mostly political babble, for it is not clear how much land is to be given away, under what conditions. Nor is it at all clear just how peace is to be assured, either with the Palestinians or the rest of the Arabs. The most intelligent Israelis think the problem is insoluble, at least for the

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time being. For if security requires an unmilitarized Palestinian state, it can be enforced only by the Israeli army, which brings everything back to the current situation. Peace rhetoric masks the difficulties of the problem. Some Israelis with whom I talked admitted that a Palestinian state would probably create grave security risks but that the present situation is intolerable–and perhaps even more risky. And behind the various Israeli views of the Palestinian problem, one senses the feeling that American pressures cannot be ignored. If one could generalize about Israeli politics, it might be said that except for the loonies on the right and the left, most Israelis have a pragmatic attitude: that is, they feel that Israel should proceed one step at a time.

The most concrete idea I heard was that a line could be drawn through the West Bank that would satisfy Israeli security needs. My own wild proposal is that Israel become the fifty-second state of the Union. This would at one stroke solve all the agonizing problems of the existence of Israel, surrounded by Arab states that cannot get the notion of obliterating the Israelis out of their heads.

The conference mentality: American academics are a new historical phenomenon. They are the monks of the modern world: monkish in their insularity and narrowness, and in their religiosity and institutional life, though more worldly in their concern with contemporary trends and movements, as well as with their careers, and in their international bustling. However, they blossom at conferences, where they exhibit themselves to each other in the jargon of their professions, for at home in their universities they are distracted by various duties and activities, such as teaching and campus politics. To be sure, I am not talking about the outstanding teachers, who usually do not participate in the marathon of conferences, and make their contributions mostly in their writings.

In Israel I attended a conference of the International Society of Political Psychology, at which I gave a paper (on the Politics and Psychology of Intellectuals). There were some intelligent and interesting people at the conference, many of them Israelis. But some of the Americans gave papers on such questions as authority, gender, and obedience that seemed too specialized. Several Israelis discussed the public response to various suggestions for dealing with the Palestinian problem, particularly with Shamir's latest proposal of free elections in the West Bank. They ranged from tough to soft, though mostly they stayed away from apocalyptic solutions.

The Americans mainly supported a Palestinian state, and they advocated dealing with the P.L.O. But what struck one was their dogmatism, their assurance, their air of high-mindedness, and the conviction they seemed to have that they were talking to members of the same fraternity.

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One American said that American foreign policy was obscene. I wanted to ask him whether American aid to Israel was obscene; I waved my hand frantically but I was not recognized. Of course, American academics have as much right to their orthodoxies as anyone else. But in the matter of Israeli relations with the Arab world, the Americans are irresponsible, for they influence Israeli academic opinions, which in turn influence the government. So far as I was able to tell, the Israelis, who have been forced into soul-searching over their moral and military dilemmas, have been jolted by constant criticism from America and Europe by the left and the right.

Some political conclusions: One gets the impression that the Israelis are suffering from an excess of advice–*aitses*, as one prominent Israeli put it. There is something strange that requires further political explanation, in the fact that there are so many qualifications to the support of Israel. When, for example, America supported France and England in World War II, it did not feel it had to approve of Churchill's or de Gaulle's policies, or of the Labor party, or of the Socialists. Nor did we hesitate to support Stalin against Hitler. Why, then, do we have to approve of everything Shamir does, or why are we deterred in our support by the politics of the religious parties? And why, when the Israelis are obviously at war with the Palestinians,who are the outpost of the Arab world, do we make the occasional brutish behavior of the Israeli army a reason for the cooling of our support? Surely, support should not depend on the Israelis living up to some ideal moral standard that no other nation adheres to.

Many people today set fewer conditions for aiding Gorbachev than they do for the support of Israel. Patently there is a double standard for large and small nations behind the American export of political altruism and moral idealism to Israel.

Edith Kurzweil

FROM WALL TO WALL

"Real solutions are not made by political psychologists," stated Yehuda Amir of Bar Ilan University at the meetings of the International Society of Political Psychologists held in Tel Aviv from June 22d to 26th, 1989. And, insofar as psychological "solutions" build up unrealistic expectations, he continued, "they may lead not only to subsequent disappointments but to the neglect of other possible paths toward resolving the conflict." Amir was one of dozens of Israelis who bared their frustrations and hopes, despair and

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personal involvement in the political and intellectual debates of their society. While they were tentative and tortured, and shied away from offering simple solutions, many of their American guests, some of whom had come straight from Ben Gurion airport to the Hilton Hotel, a few of them for the first time, and who outnumbered their hosts, offered to solve Israel's problems by generalizing from their own carefully worked-out paradigms on topics such as Holocaust mentality, protest movement psychology, obedience to authority, cognitive values of democracy, national character studies, and more. Although nearly all the Israeli participants also were of left persuasions, one could see one or another of them flinch at some of the more naive and ignorant comments, at the underlying assumptions of questions being asked in authoritative fashion. Comparisons among Mai-Lai, Nazi death camps and the *Intifada* sometimes included "the atrocities committed by Oliver North," or "American obscenities in Latin America" –not as part of a debate but as preambles to other issues. The Israelis, it seemed to me, did not challenge these statements, either because they did not know enough about American policy outside of its effect on Israel, because they were eager to debate their own problems, or because they did not want to offend the Americans–whose support, many Israelis are convinced, is crucial to the survival of their country.

Still, those of the visitors who came to listen heard how complex the issues are, how even every partial solution itself is bound to create new problems that change the dynamics between Middle-Eastern and European Jews, religious and secular Jews, Israelis and Israeli Arabs–whose self-identifications now are in a continuous state of flux. We were told about efforts to educate youngsters for tolerance, in a situation where very young children, both Arab and Israeli, during the past decade, have been found increasingly intolerant–members of groups which question the legitimacy of other groups, because "each group threatens the values of the others." That Arabs now must shun contact with Israelis or fear for their lives, and that Israeli settlers in "the territories" want to take the law into their own hands, can only increase the demonization. During my stay, the Shamir plan seemed to be the litmus test. "Fifty-two percent of Likud voters support elections in the territories," reported Elihu Katz, the head of the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, on June 23d in *The Jerusalem Post*. Extrapolating from data on ethnicity, and from previous opinion polls, he maintained that "if elections in the territories may be considered a dovish initiative, it may be accurate to conclude that. . .[these] attitudes correlate, but not strongly, with a willingness to relinquish territories in return for peace."

One has to be in Israel to realize what it means to give up the West Bank, to accept again a situation where the width of the country at some

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points would be no more than twelve miles, where enemies even more easily than now could invade one's backyard. So, while most of the Israelis I met don't want Israel to "rule" the Palestinians, and would be willing to give "land for peace," they would not do so without the necessary guarantees of security. Their debates revolve around how to reach this goal, what constitutes security, and who is to guarantee it. Their newspapers dwell on, and condemn, every infringement of human rights–by both Arabs and Israelis. I must confess, however, that I understood their fears better after a professor was killed while walking to work a few days after our arrival–in a grove about half a mile from where we were staying. (When reading about the terrorist attack on the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem bus, after my return, I realized that it could have been "my" bus, since I used it eight times.)

Such incidents always reopen the debate on whether peace and security are compatible, on whether security may be possible without the military–in a country which since its creation has been surrounded by enemies and inevitably has gotten used to relying on military solutions. "Arabs and Palestinians must convince us that they no longer challenge the very existence of the state of Israel," say some; "What must they do to convince us?" ask others. Yet, political convictions clash with military solutions of the *Intifada*; issues of personal safety are confused with those of national security; and, paradoxically, the Israeli military is asking for political solutions while a majority of the population would want the army to be tougher. Indeed, it was found that Israeli public opinion polls do not support the social psychologists' construct of the military mind; and that Israeli soldiers are low on scales of dogmatism and authoritarianism, though high on nationalism. Could it be that a citizens' army cannot be measured on the scales of a professional one?

These issues came up also at the first seminar sponsored by the James Shasha International Institute, whose founder, an Argentinian businessman, believes that through first-hand, human contact alone, international understanding may evolve. Given the title of the seminar, "The People of the Book in the Global Village: Media and Messages Through Time and Space," the organizers took the participants (they came from around the globe) back to the days of King Solomon and King David–by means of rare books, and by a trip to the excavations at Megiddo, some of which yielded 4,500 year-old treasures. And we were guests at Kibbutz Hazorea, which was started by a handful of young German Jews who fled the Nazis in the 1930s. To ensure democratic participation by over a thousand members, they recently have installed cable television in every living room.

Not only the founding kibbutznik who took us around, but also all the other experts, explained current issues in terms of their historical as well as their problematic contexts. Thus we heard, for instance, how Israelis of

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various origins decode the messages they believe the producers of *Dallas* are transmitting to them; how "the book" is transformed in the electronic age; and how terrorism is used as both message and medium. The intensity of personal involvement, the mix of people, and the sheer volume of information thrown at us, distinguished this meeting from most of the others.

The session on fundamentalism, by experts on its Christian, Jewish, and Moslem branches, dealt with the different features of groups within each of them in terms of their views of the past and the future, and in terms of believers' expectations of actualizing these "realities" in the present. Christian fundamentalism, we learned, is the only one that does not aim to challenge the state, although it expects to influence laws pertaining to family issues, abortion, or creationism. Jewish fundamentalism has many variations. The Netureikarta, for example, who see themselves in the middle of the Messianic period, believe that the study of the Torah alone is protection for the existing Jewish state. This pits them, among other things, against Zionism, which advocates protection by means of a police force. The Netureikarta accept violent protest: they have no problem with throwing stones at cars that travel on the Sabbath–while refusing to serve in the military or to raise funds for Israel's defense. (A few of them felt close enough to Khomeini to pay their respects at his grave.) The Gush Emunim, on the other hand, condemn the reality of the Jewish state because it is not religious, and because its secular government lacks sanctity and thus interferes with the coming of the Messiah. Actually, those who a few years ago blew up the Mosque thought they were accelerating the move toward redemption.

Moslem fundamentalists also perceive themselves in a state of siege. Islam cannot accept challenges by insiders, especially by men such as Salman Rushdie, and by all others who accept modern values, we were told–even though Islam approves of specific innovations. Ideally, it seems, Moslems prefer to spread the word by education rather than by violence, but decide also upon the conditions under which the use of violence and vengeance are legitimate. Usually such conditions are linked to economics, and tend to occur when economic expectations have been dashed. Therefore, fundamentalism did not take hold in oil-rich countries with small populations, and in Iran alone was able to seize state power. Again, the presence of these fundamentalist beliefs were discussed as explosive forces threatening Israeli democracy.

At the farewell dinner, I overheard someone propose that Israel might be divided as "successfully" as Berlin, by means of a wall, with or without a no-man's land. Since I had just flown to Israel from Berlin, I could not help but ponder on the gaping differences. After all, in Berlin Germans live on each side of the wall and neither side has ever threatened to get rid of the other. Were the West Bank to be separated by a wall, these Americans

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agreed, it would have to be patrolled by an international body. The security of Berlin, however, is maintained by the balance of power between the United Stated and the Soviet Union–neither of whom want a nuclear war–rather than by a less interested United Nations force. The diversities, it seems to me, also were palpable in the general atmospheres of Berlin and Jerusalem. Jerusalem's everyday life, though full of bustle and cultural activities, of zest and involvement, seems tensed for unpleasant surprises as well. Berlin, whose center reminds one of the films about the Weimar days, and where outlandish clothes, green, orange, and purple hair along with other manifestations of punk compete for attention, by comparison seems settled. Its wall is ignored, along with the countrymen on its other side, except when West Berliners briefly are reminded of it by their politicians. They hailed Gorbachev, for example, when he told them, referring to the wall, that "nothing is permanent," expecting life to go on as it has, and planning their vacations in Uzbekhastan and Samarkand "unless the situation there gets out of hand."

I came up against the Berlin Wall unexpectedly, when visiting the Martin Gropius Bau, a squat, imposing and marvelous premodernist structure by Walter Gropius's uncle. I had been told to visit the excellent exhibit, "Europe and the Orient: 800-1900" and was not alerted to the fact that it adjoined no-man's land and could be observed from a Soviet watch tower. Nor was I aware of the museum's permanent collection of works by "lesser" contemporaries of Klee and Klimt, or of its scant, pitiful collection of Judaica. Upon seeing the handful of religious items, and portraits of a number of Jewish leaders and intellectuals of the Weimar period, it occurred to me that museums around Germany now must be vying for the few items the fervid Nazis failed to destroy.

From a nearby room came sounds of music. Overcome by curiosity, I followed them: they were produced by a television set playing early Soviet revolutionary films–showing workers who were dropping their tools and their chains, who eagerly joined their comrades singing the *International* and other catchy revolutionary tunes, and who were walking toward an ever-better life while waving the red flag. I stood there alone, caught up by this past; in front of me were five empty, black chairs. What a wonderful dream the communists had, I reminded myself, as I thought of the wall outside; of Gorbachev's current dream to capitalize communism, and of the military put-down of the Chinese students–which was chronicled in great detail in the German newspaper I was carrying. (A few days later, in Hazorea, I learned that a self-sufficient kibbutz–a microcosm of the communist dream–also must rely on capitalist management and on modern technology.) And like Lenin, I asked myself, and continue to ask myself, "What is to be done?"–to ensure

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Israel's survival, and to fight the terrorism and the ideologies of both right and left that keep taking on newer and more sophisticated forms. And like Trotsky, I wondered why even democracy and human freedom, the only conditions under which we want to live, have to be defended–also–against so many careerists for whom they have become slogans furthering intellectual or political careers.

As we go to press, we are saddened by the news of the death of Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989), a friend and early contributor. He was one of the few surviving traditional men of letters: a novelist, poet, critic, and an exemplary figure of a writer possessed of a wide-ranging literary intelligence. All his work had a classic quality, free of the wild and modish trends that have become so popular lately.

W. P.

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William Phillips and Edith Kurzweil

AN INTERVIEW WITH TEDDY KOLLEK

EK: Everyone knows you have been responsible for many of the wonderful buildings of Jerusalem, and the cultural activities. To what extent have the events during the last eighteen months somehow curtailed or influenced the activities you planned for the growth of the city?
TK: The last eighteen months have influenced a lot of things but they have not stopped our cultural activities: a new very interesting museum was opened in the Citadel, where the oldest buildings go back as far as the time of Herod and the Romans, the Crusaders, the Mamelukes, and the Turks. The museum shows the history of the city in an original way, by highlighting the remnants of such buildings. Its opening was a cultural event. Very soon we will start to build a central Arab library for the eastern part of the city. We can do that now because we have finally found the money and the place for it–we have freed the space where we think it should be built which had been occupied by a bus depot. Whatever happened this year is not pleasant but it does not affect cultural development. Last night I looked in to see the Riga Ballet perform "Swan Lake " at the Hassenfeld open-air amphitheater. In the fall the Bolshoi Ballet is coming here. And tonight the Sixth Jerusalem Film Festival is opening with about one hundred-thirty films.* It starts with a commemoration of *Gone with the Wind,* including an exhibition of the costumes worn in the film. There is also a large exhibition at the Israel Museum about the daily and religious life of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. Last night the museum opened with another outstanding exhibition of Egyptian scarabs, with a beautiful catalogue. So I don't find any curtailment. Also, the youth orchestras are continuing to play, people are reading books, going to concerts and movies, to the cafés and parks, and more.

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*At the end of the festival, the first Wolgin Prizes for Israeli Films were awarded. The two categories were full-length feature films and short films. Only Israeli films are eligible for the competition as the intention is to encourage quality film-making in Israel. The jurors' choice for first prize in the short film category was also the film they singled out for the greatest praise—*The Shelter*, a short feature about the difficult conditions of Palestinian construction workers in Tel Aviv, directed by a Palestinian Arab from Gaza and produced by a Bedouin Arab, both of whom live and work in Tel Aviv.

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EK: We are stunned by all that. We became aware of it as soon as we got here. How do you explain that nobody outside the country knows about all these activities?

TK: That's due to all your professional colleagues. None of this makes headlines. But if somebody gets a stone thrown at his car it makes a headline.

WP: Do you have an explanation for that? There's no doubt that Israel, and Jerusalem, are getting a bad press, and there is a mounting tide of critical opinion in America.

TK: No. I can't explain it. Look, you have the most obscene things happening. Suddenly I hear that many Labor members in Parliament speak out against us and talk with the PLO. They are members of the same party which, when McDonald was the minister of colonies, stopped the Jews from saving themselves by coming here from Germany or from occupied Europe. Members of the same party who belong to a country that made the first pact with Hitler, making him respectable in Munich and Berchtesgarden, that has been fighting the Irish all these years, and they dare to criticize us. You have Kurds gassed by rockets by the Iraqis, and it may make a small paragraph on page three or five of the newspapers. And the Iranians were sending children ahead of the army to explode their land mines, and thousands of them are getting killed. Look what the Syrians are doing in Beirut. I could give you dozens of other examples, but nobody cares about them. So what can we do? This is it.

WP: There's been a shift. Now a lot of the criticism comes from England and Germany, from labor and from the left. That didn't exist in the past. Intellectuals, academics, and the left generally. Don't you think there's been a shift?

TK: Well, I'll tell you a story which has only a little to do with this, but still something. Someone I greatly admire, one of our great labor leaders, is a man named Hazan. He is eighty and a universally admired figure. He was asked on television a little while ago if he ever had made any mistakes. He said,"Yes, I've made one great mistake. For a while I took the position that we had two fatherlands, Israel and Russia." And that was Stalin's Russia. Now I know that the left has been wrong forever. I don't know of a single thing the left, as the left, has done right. I grew up in Vienna, when the Social Democrats were called the Two-and-a Half International because they were somewhere between the Communist International, the Third International, and the Second International. And I know now how wrong they were then.

WP: We agree with you.

TK: This doesn't mean that the individuals were wrong, but as parties, they were not very admirable. You know what it leads us to all the time. For instance, the left and the liberals among others were all against the Shah. And

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rightly so. What did they get instead? And they were all against Vietnam, because people in Vietnam were glorified. What do you see there now, in the whole of Indochina? What cruelty in the name of the left. It is no recommendation to be on the left.

WP: We agree with you. We went to a conference here and we noticed that a lot of the Americans on the left come here to criticize Israeli foreign policy.

TK: What conference was that?

EK: It was a political psychology conference in Tel Aviv.

WP: The Americans come with advice to Israel, they all know what Israel should do.

TK: I think that in Jerusalem we have done more for the Arabs than ever was done for the Arabs by the Arabs. When the city was united, we offered them a variety of things which were unique. We offered them the choice of remaining Jordanians or becoming Israeli citizens. We knew very few would want to become Israeli citizens. We regained East Jerusalem after a war that was unprovoked, that they had started. Now, we offered them a choice in citizenship, something which was never offered before. In Europe, when the frontiers were changed, in Silesia, Alsace-Lorraine, or Schleswig-Holstein, the people either had to leave or to accept citizenship of the new country. In the Middle Ages, when the head of a kingdom changed religion, from Protestant to Catholic, or the other way around, all the subjects had to change their religion. We were the first to make such an offer. We also offered those who chose to remain the right to vote in municipal elections. The Dutch are now introducing a similar law but people have to wait five years. And the law hasn't been accepted as far as I know. But we were the first to do this. We accepted the Arab League curriculum for Arab schools in East Jerusalem. With great self-denial, we allow them to administer the Temple Mount, which is, after all, the site of the First and Second Temples, our holiest site. Do you see any mention of all this in the foreign press?

WP: No. Let me ask you, do the Arabs here in Jerusalem appreciate what Israel and you personally have done?

TK: Do any citizens ever appreciate what government does for them? I think many city governments and countrywide governments do a lot for their citizens. Do the citizens ever appreciate it? Should the press appreciate it? Or the leadership? Or the people? Why should they appreciate it? People appreciate specific things, such as streetlights on their streets; getting water they couldn't get before. These are the things they appreciate, but not anything abstract.

WP: Well, life is much better here now, as you yourself said.

TK: But nationalism is stronger than a good life.

WP: That's true.

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TK: The Arabs in Jerusalem are good patriots and they demand more things than is reasonable. You see, the capital of Saudi Arabia is not in Mecca and not in Medina. It is in a little country town, Riyad, so that religious rights should be observed and preserved. So why should their capital be in Jerusalem, what has the one to do with the other? Unlike us, the Jews, whose political and religious capital has always been Jerusalem and only Jerusalem.

EK: It is said in much of the press that the people who are against Israel outside of the country are Jewish. And it is said that this has to do with Jewish self-hatred which seems to be picked up as a kind of anti-Israel attitude in the place of anti-Semitism.

TK: Maybe there is something in that, I don't know. I spent last night with Abe Rosenthal, who for twenty years was the editor of *The New York Times*, and he for one has none of these complexes.

EK: He's the only one on *The Times* who is good to you. He's a minority.

TK: No, I think Frankel is just as friendly.

EK: But he doesn't write editorials.

TK: He isn't in charge of the editorial page, isn't that a man named Gelb?

EK: I'm not sure. Unfortunately, for every pro-Israel piece on the op-ed page there is certain to be one against it, too.

WP Well, what about Anthony Lewis?

TK: He's a left, ultra-liberal ideologue.

WP: Okay, we agree.

EK: What disturbs us is that what we see as a positive thing here, the open discussion as a sign of true democracy, is picked up over there in a one-sided way. "If even the Israelis say it," we hear, "it really must be worse." Do you see any way of influencing this situation?

TK: Not that I would know. I don't think it's very important. It's not pleasant though.

EK: Don't you think it can influence American foreign policy towards Israel? After all, American politicians go by what the electorate seems to want.

TK: I don't think so. I hope not. I don't think the press has that much to say. I wouldn't know what to do about it anyway. Besides, it's really not my concern. I'm concerned solely with Jerusalem, with putting the idea of Jerusalem across. I don't try to solve any bigger problems.

EK: But isn't the Jerusalem problem pretty big, especially when they start to talk about a possible partitioning?

TK: Let them talk. I don't think it will happen.

WP: There's an awful lot of irresponsible talk.

TK: So what can you do? You see, we have to live by our standards, and not anyone else's. We can't allow Jewish vigilantes. And because we live by

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our own standards, we shouldn't be influenced by the press, foreign or local. I think our standards are on the whole positive ones. It is sometimes difficult,though, because people are influenced.
WP: We have observed also a division of Israeli opinion itself, on many of these basic questions.
TK: Well, when you have a free country and there is free discussion, sometimes things are exaggerated in all directions.
WP: You don't think the division has harmful effects?
TK: Look, it certainly would be much better if we could talk in unison. But it's not always very effective. The Russians have talked in unison for years. Look where it led them. So there are exaggerations in our internal criticisms, sometimes even masochistic criticism. But this is how we are, we can't change that.
WP: Amos Oz has told us that people don't realize that the Peace Now movement here is not the same as the Peace Now movement in America. In America it is sort of floating in the air and is irresponsible. Peace Now here, he claims, is much more responsible.
EK: What do you think of the movement here?
TK: I think their sentiments are correct, but they aren't very practical. Still, you need impractical people too. I think they're a decent lot.
WP: You're right, there are a lot of *luftmenschen*.
EK: I was going to ask another question which may be a bit foolish: people have compared you to Ed Koch of New York. Do you see these similarities?
TK: Yes, they have compared the cities and their problems. But there are seven million people there, we have half a million people. Jerusalem is different from every other city. It really cannot be compared. I will give you the basics. New York is a heterogeneous city and so are we. But all the people in New York, or most, regard themselves as Americans, and they want to be Americans; in the end you won't have a melting pot, that will never come about, but you'll have a mother culture. They'll all speak English, and they'll all want to be Americans. This is not so here. This is a heterogeneous city historically and on principle. The Greeks have been here for roughly 1,800 years, and they are still a tight community; and the Armenians and the Ethiopians have been here since the beginning of the fourth century. They have kept their language, their religion, their eating habits, their dress, and their own schools; and they have never wanted to become Arab or Turk or British or Jordanian. They want to remain Armenians or Ethiopians. This is one aspect. Secondly, Jerusalem is a very poor city. Not that New York is the richest one. Still, compared to us it is a rich city. I think that Ed Koch is a good mayor and a good person, and he has always been very decent to us in the positions he has taken. He visited here several

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times; he liked it here; and he is a good friend. I think it is unfortunate that he ran into all these difficulties recently. But that's life.

WP: He resembles you in one respect. He's very forthright, very direct, very frank, and pretty honest.

TK: I think he's an admirable person. If I should speak from our point of view, the mayors' point of view: all the other candidates in the coming New York elections, with the possible exception of Dick Ravitch, have no administrative experience of running a city. And I think administrative experience in running a city is a prime necessity for a mayor. Probably my closest friend, the most intelligent person I know, is Isaiah Berlin. I would dread him being the mayor.

EK: So what are you looking for in a mayor?

WP: Well, there's a lot of ideology in New York.

EK: As you said, you need someone to deal with the sewage, the street lights and the drug problem.

WP: Do you have a large drug problem here?

TK: We have a drug problem, it's not in the same class as yours. We are trying to fight it, not very successfully. Of course, there is the connection between the drug problem and crime. But it's not on the same scale as yours, by far.

WP: No, not the kind of crime we have in New York. In fact,we keep saying that despite all the attempts to frighten us by the American media, as you were saying before, Jerusalem seems to be a safer city than New York.

TK: Yes, definitely. It's also a city full of life.

EK: Well, this is what hits you when you get here.

TK: It's alive. There are hundreds of examples of common activities between Jews and Arabs. Go to the Liberty Bell Garden and see how many Arabs picnic under the trees, and how many children come to the roller skating rink: or go to the new museum and see how many Arabs visit there.

EK: And this is going on in spite of the *Intifada*.

TK: Yesterday we had a meeting of neighborhood councils. All the Arab neighborhood councils were there. And we talked frankly about all sorts of things.

EK: Do you see them as getting more politicized as the *Intifada* goes on?

TK: I think these are aspects of freedom, this is one part, and there is the other; they do both. When they discuss politics they are on one side. When they discuss school buildings or street lighting or libraries, they are on the other side. What goes on in their minds is very complicated.

EK: Do you think that when they close the shops in the Old City, for instance, that they are hurting themselves by not selling?

TK: Look, there is one thing that is vastly underestimated. That is the Arab

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fear of Arab terrorism. Terrorism is part of Arab political culture. Hardly any Arab leader has died in bed. This goes through the whole tragic history of the lives of the kings, through all the prime ministers in Syria, up to the present one, and you don't know yet how he will end. As you know, Sadat wasn't the first Egyptian leader who was killed. As to the Arab shopkeepers, some of them came to us when the police tried to force them to open and said, what can you do to us? You can either put us in jail or you can fine us. It's not pleasant. But the other side can burn our shops and kill our children. So the balance of our fear is on the other side, and we'll always do what they demand of us.

WP: That's not publicized sufficiently.

EK: We also noticed that many Arabs are working here.

TK: We have 1,500 Arab city employees in Jerusalem out of 5,000 employees all together. And there hasn't been a strike and none have absented themselves during this period.

WP: What's impressive here to us is not only the vitality, but that people care. They seem to have a civic sense. They care what happens to them. In New York that feeling is not very strong.

TK: That is true. That is true also of the city officials. The gardeners have pride in the gardens. The street cleaners have pride in keeping the city clean.

EK: That's clear, and it helps make it so beautiful. Somehow I have the feeling that it would help to just get all the people who criticize to come and look. I know you have some programs.

TK: What program would do this?

EK: I think the American Jewish Committee, among other organizations, brings in groups of ten people at a time to show them around.

TK: There are lots of visitors here. But that affects a small group of people. It doesn't communicate anything to the large numbers.

WP: What you have to do is change *The New York Times*.

EK: And *The Washington Post*?

TK: Let me tell you something. I was in the States, and our consul persuaded me to stay for another day, and spend Jerusalem Day in New York. It was a Saturday night of a long weekend, when everyone leaves town. I thought that this would not make much sense, but still I went to St. John the Divine. There were 14,000 people there to celebrate Jerusalem, with a concert by the Brooklyn Symphony with Lucas Foss conducting. There were other parts to the program as well. Fourteen thousand people celebrated Jerusalem,but there was not a line in *The New York Times*; there was not a line in the Israeli papers. So I thought it a waste of time. It wasn't important. Because if it isn't in *The New York Times*, it hasn't happened.

EK: Do you sometimes come to New York as a private citizen?

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TK: No. Since I am a mayor, with one exception of two weeks in Spain, I haven't taken a holiday in twenty years. My job is all-consuming. If I am in New York, I am busy from six in the morning to midnight.
EK: If ever you are going to know in advance, maybe you might spend an evening at the home of one of our Advisory Board members, to talk to a group of people. We would very much like it.
TK: Thank you very much, I will keep it in mind.

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Amos Oz

STRONG NERVES AND GERMAN IRONY

For forty years now we have been teaching ourselves that the murder of European Jewry can be explained but not understood. It was pronounced incomprehensible because, "if you were not there yourself, you are incapable of . . ." and so forth. Yet it could be explained because there is "context" and "meaning." And so explanations piled upon explanations: from Jean-Paul Sartre to Friedlander, from Hannah Arendt to Viktor Frankl, from Elie Wiesel to Menachem Begin. It has been explained from a Marxist perspective and in a theological context. The intellectual significance and the political background have been explored. And it has been explained in terms of historiosophy and by psychoanalytical methods, among others.

Claude Lanzmann tells us the exact opposite: There is no point in explaining, but, for once, let us try to comprehend.

Comprehension is possible, provided we are willing to immerse ourselves in the most minute detail. What time was it? Where did they put their clothes and shoes? How cold was it? What color were the death trucks? How many minutes did it take to get from the platform to the crematorium? Who paid for the transports? How did they load and unload? What exactly did they do with the thighbones that were too heavy to be burned in the regular way?

This microscopic detail is what gives Lanzmann's creation a Tolstoyan, Joycean, Proustian dimension. The film *Shoah* resembles *War and Peace*, and in another sense it resembles *Ulysses* and *Remembrance of Things Past*. It is a journey into memory that aspires, ideally, to document everything: each fraction of a second multiplied by four years, multiplied by six million. As we said: an obsession with detail. Ideally, this is a film without an end; a film seeking to have the screening time of one thousand years and more. We are told that Lanzmann shot three hundred and fifty hours of film, of which he has shown us less than ten. As a matter of principle, this film ought to continue until the end of time.

> I am man, but You are God, You have a Creator's
> imagination.
> Surely You were there among Your flocks

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> In Auschwitz and Majdanek, in Belzec and Treblinka,
> In Ponari and Bergen-Belsen–
> You know how to describe that spectacle in its every line,
> every groan, every glance.
> You have the imagination, and You have the strong nerves of diivinity–
>
> -Uri Zvi Greenberg, "Streets of the River"

We don't have the "strong nerves of divinity." We won't watch a continuous showing of, let us say, six hours each day over a period of fifty years. Lanzmann's attempt is therefore doomed to failure in the same sense that the efforts of Tolstoy, Joyce, and Proust were shattered by the limits of human time. It is not possible to document everything. It is impossible to describe that spectacle in its every line, every groan, every glance. But that is the thrust of Lanzmann's efforts. It is his way of comprehending the "incomprehensible."

If Adolf Hitler had given strict orders to destroy all the house pets and farm animals throughout the Third Reich, dogs and cats, parrots and goldfish, horses, cows, goats, sheep, and pigs, we can assume there would have been outbreaks of civil disobedience throughout occupied Europe and in Germany itself. After all, one cares for one's dog or cat. People would have tried to hide their house pets until the mad verdict was over. The extermination of horses, cows, and pigs would have incensed millions whose livelihood this would have jeopardized, not to mention the threat to the war effort, or the fact that everyone would have realized immediately that whoever had given the orders to destroy the animals was stark raving mad.

But there is no point in such reflections: a Jew is neither a goldfish nor a pig. In the Department of Jewish Affairs of the Reich Ministry of Defense, at 116 Kurfurstendamm in Berlin, Adolf Eichmann and his aides sat and organized the killing of six million human beings in accordance with vague, sketchy instructions in a letter ("to carry out all preparations with regard to a total solution of the Jewish question") that had been sent from the office of Hermann Goring to Reinhard Heydrich. The enormous project was carried out without burdening the German taxpayer with a single penny's expenditure: historian Raul Hilberg explains on camera that the Gestapo purchased group-fare tickets at a discount (half-price for children) from the Reich railroad authority. The tickets were paid for with Jewish money expropriated by the Gestapo from bank accounts owned by Jews. The special tracks, the camps and barracks, the disrobing rooms, the gas chambers, and the crematoria were built by Jewish slave labor. The production line itself was operated by a handful of Germans, aided by Lithuanian and Ukrainian guard

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units. The "job" was done almost entirely by Jewish "task forces." And from Paris to Bialystok, from Amsterdam to Salonika, Christian Europe stood by and watched the disappearance of the Jews–and kept silent.

Some of the Polish peasants in Lanzmann's film explain the silence better than all the philosophers and their theories. They, the Jews, always knew it would come, that this was bound to happen to them someday. And we, the peasants, knew it was bound to come. And in their hearts, they, the Jews, knew that they had it coming to them. And we, the peasants, also knew they had it coming to them, because they were all rich, and very, very dishonest, and they always had a bad smell about them, and they weren't even Polish, but held all of Poland in their hands, and they had exploited Poland and handed Jesus Christ over for crucifixion, and even agreed, in front of Pontius Pilate, that his blood would be on their heads and on the heads of their children. So why the wonder that it finally happened? The Jews weren't all that surprised and neither were we. Even so, it's a bit of a shame about them. Even Jesus didn't want to take vengeance this far. It would have been much better if they'd all gone to Palestine and been done with it.

Paradoxically, horrifyingly, this last sentence is a kind of Zionist consensus on the whole film: It would have been better if they had all gone to Palestine and been done with it.

It seems that this sentence would have been endorsed by all those interviewed: the survivors, the Polish peasants of Chelmno, the Nazi murderers in the film; indeed, almost all the characters, perhaps even Claude Lanzmann himself.

But Lanzmann lives in Paris, and most of the Jews he interviewed are scattered all over, from Switzerland to New York.

First scene: Simon Srebnik, the "Chelmno nightingale," returns to the place of the mass killing forty years later. A Polish peasant rows him in a boat down a lovely little river, and Simon sits there and sings. He survived mostly because of his melodious voice. At the age of thirteen, after the Lodz ghetto after the death of his parents, he was brought to the camp to serve the overlords with his toil and his songs. This Simon must have been an extraordinarily sweet child: even the aged Polish residents of Chelmno and the wife of the local Nazi German schoolmaster clearly remember the charm of his Polish and German singing. And they unanimously say how happy they are that this lovely child was saved from death. The Gestapo apparently treated him like a talisman or mascot of their unit: His legs were put in iron chains, and he learned to hop with his legs tied and to sing for them the sentimental kitsch songs from the regions of their birth, thus soothing their nostalgia and easing the pangs of their homesickness.

"It was always this peaceful here," Simon says. "Always. When they

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burned two thousand people–Jews–every day it was just as peaceful." The flames, he recalls, reached "zum Himmel" (to the sky); yet, everything was quiet. Nobody ever raised his voice around here.

Lanzmann, a relentless interviewer, asks Simon Srebnik to sing one of those songs. And Simon sings amid the Polish landscape. His tenor voice is still very pleasant, and the peasants stop to listen. These peasants live in houses that once belonged to Jews.

> Now silence reigns all over this land of death
> And brightness and light and the song of birds and many colors.
> Strings of small towns along rivers and woods.
> The cities in the plain exalt the cross. . .Ivan and Stepan are dwelling in our homes there–
>
> -Uri Zvi Greenberg, "Streets of the River"

Mordechai Podchlebnik is the second survivor of Chelmno. "It's not good for me to talk about this," he says with a smile. Lanzmann, as usual, presses for details: numbers, locations, methods, facts. How did they kill? Where did they do the killing? How did they dispose of the bodies? And Podchlebnik, although "it's not good for me to talk about this," begins to describe everything, in detail, without losing his smile. "Ask him," Lanzmann says to the interpreter, "why he smiles all the time." And the man, like a Jew from a story by Sholom Aleichem, still smiling, answers the question with another question: "So what does he want me to do? Cry?" And, after a moment of reflection, he adds, "And if you're alive, it's better to smile."

Motke Zaidl did not go to Poland with Lanzmann. He is interviewed in a forest in Israel, not in the woods of Ponari. (The place resembles Ponari, he says, except that there were no stones in Ponari. Also, the Lithuanian woods are much, much denser than this forest in Israel.)

"How did you react the first time you unloaded corpses, when the gas van doors were opened? Lanzmann asks.

"What could I do? The third day, I put my wife and children in the pit and asked to be killed also. But the Germans said I was strong enough to work, that I wouldn't be killed yet."

Lanzmann: "Was the weather very cold?"

Zaidl: "It was very cold–in the winter of 1942, early January."

We hear this question and the answer many times throughout the film. Even an SS man agrees without hesitation: "Yes, sir, we were very cold. The poor Jews, who were completely naked, might just have been even colder. But maybe they warmed themselves in the railroad cars, during the ride, because it was very crowded in there and that created a little body

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heat. It's hard to tell."

In Vilnius (Vilna), in the Ponari woods, they didn't burn the bodies at first, but buried them in mass graves. And that was no good. On this point, too, one of the Nazis interviewed agrees: The graves were shallow, so the soil expanded and cracked from the gases emitted by the swelling corpses, creating a terrible stench. "Schrecklich, sehr Schrecklich." "It was awful," and there was a danger of epidemics. Another way had to be found.

"They buried them," says Yitzhak Dugin, formerly of Vilna, "like sardines in a can. They put all the Jews of Vilna and its vicinity into the soil at Ponari. Ninety thousand altogether. But on January 1, 1944, we got an order from the Gestapo commander of Vilna to open up all the ditches; to take the bodies out and burn them so that no trace would remain. They gave us a plan: to start from the beginning–to start by opening the oldest ditches. When we got to the last ditch, the bodies were still fresh and in very good condition, because of the cold. When the last mass grave was opened, I dug up my whole family. My mother and my sisters. Three sisters and their children. They had been in the earth only four months, and they hadn't rotted because of the cold. I recognized them by their faces and by their clothes. Twenty-four thousand people were buried in that ditch. The deeper you dug, the more you saw bodies pressed together flat like boards. You'd take a body and it would crumble completely right away. At first they wouldn't let us use tools. They told us: Get used to doing it all with your hands. If we cried, they'd beat us mercilessly with sticks. They also didn't let us use the words 'bodies' or 'victims.' They forced us to use the words 'Figuren' or 'Dreck' or 'Shmattes.' If you said 'victims,' you got a beating. We had to burn these *Figuren* so that no trace was left of them."

In the woods around the Sobibor death camp, too, they tried to cover their tracks, to obliterate every trace. A Polish witness says that in Treblinka, after the camp was closed in 1943, the Germans went to the trouble of planting pine trees, "five-year-old saplings they were," so that by 1944 you could no longer see any sign of what happened there.

Lanzmann hasn't found anyone to ask about the reason for this German discretion: Was it fear of punishment in case Germany lost the war? If so, then punishment by whom? Was it shame, perhaps? But if so, then shame before whom?

At the time of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, the West German newspaper *Nüremberger Nachrichten* published, on April 26, 1961, the following statement: "In light of the preconceived notions that, partly due to insufficient information, partly due to lack of understanding, and partly due to simple malice, have accumulated in the minds of certain people, especially abroad, concerning National Socialism and especially its racial policy, we have

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assumed that the Eichmann trial would increase this lack of understanding. But now it appears that, together with a great deal of negativism–the trial has brought to light facts that may offset the incorrect evaluations that prevailed before–he [Eichmann] was a decent young man. . . who, by his own testimony, always merely carried out the abominable tasks that were demanded of him. He did so unwillingly and with inner resistance. . . He confessed that he could not consider becoming a doctor, for example, because even an open cut made him sick to his stomach and he couldn't look. . . .In the Chelmno camp Eichmann once watched a group of naked Jews being executed by the gas engine, and he had to turn away. . . . Indeed the cries of the victims grated on his nerves. . . ."

Another excerpt, from a different sort of German newspaper, *Die Deutsche Zeitung, of May 25, 1961, said:* ". . . *One of the witnesses, testi*fying about the methods of annihilation in Galicia, was asked why, in light of the expected annihilation, the inmates of the ghetto did not gather their strength for one last counterattack, even if it was hopeless. What a lack of understanding! What an academic question! . . . No one who has not been through all this can truly understand. . . . The arguments of the witness, I say [the speaker is the German reporter who covered the Eichmann trial], surely hold good for the German people as well: No one who did not go through what the Germans went through can understand. The war, which they perceived as a battle for survival forced upon them from the outside, the day-to-day worries about self-preservation, fear of the system..."

And at the end of his article this reporter adds some words of admiration for the beauty of the people of Israel: "A young nation that bears arms with enthusiasm, that loves its homeland without intellectual doubts, that truly identifies its nationalism with its personality. Come, they say, and look at us: Do we look like Jews. . . ? Their faces bear no resemblance to the traditional features. . . of the diaspora Jew."

(Both excerpts were taken from an anthology, *The Eichmann Trial in West German Public Opinion,* in Hebrew, edited by Avraham Bartura.)

A Polish man in Lanzmann's film, maybe from the city of Kolo or from Chelmno, describes the reception given to the Jewish deportees on one of the railroad platfroms. "It was. . . true German irony."

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THEY WERE DEFINITELY CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

Here's an example of "true German irony": Rudolf Vrba, well-spoken, charismatic, elegant in a well-tailored suit, who escaped from Auschwitz on April 7, 1944, describes, with a slight, sardonic smile, his work as a registration clerk at a death camp:

"It was night at Auschwitz. They woke us for work. On the platform, at ten-yard intervals, stood the SS troops with dogs and submachine guns. The platform was flooded with blinding spotlights. We waited. The locomotive pulled in slowly. The train came to a stop. One of the Unterscharführers moved from one car to the next and unlocked them from the outside. People peered out of the windows, which were covered with barbed wire. They had been en route for ten or fifteen days. They were hungry, thirsty, and exhausted. Inside the cars, the living sat on the bodies of the dead and the dying. They had no idea what this station was. The name Auschwitz told them nothing. They streamed out of the cars, and the Germans shouted, "Raus! Schnell!" and hit them with whips and sticks. But at one point, one of the German officers spoke to the crowd on the platform with unusual courtesy: 'Welcome,' he said. 'We apologize for the inconvenient travel conditions. In a little while each of you will get a cup of tea and you'll be well taken care of. You'll be just fine here.' "

In a secret address delivered to SS generals in Poznan on October 4, 1943, Gestapo chief Heinrich Himmler praised his unsung heroes, who carried out their difficult, thankless task: ". . . I also want to talk to you quite frankly on a very grave matter. Among ourselves it should be mentioned quite frankly, and yet we will never speak of it publicly. I mean. . . the extermination of the Jewish race. . . . Most of you must know what it means whan 100 corpses are lying side by side, or five hundred, or one thousand. To have stuck it out and at the same time–apart from exceptions caused by human weakness–to have remained decent fellows, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written. . . ."

"On August 31, [1942] Himmler had ordered an Einsatz detachment to execute a hundred inmates of the Minsk prison, so that he could see how it was done. According to Bach-Zalewski, a high officer in the SS who was present, Himmler almost swooned when he saw the effect of the first volley from the firing squad. A few minutes later, when the shots failed to kill two

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Jewish women outright, the SS Fuehrer became hysterical. One result of this experience was an order from Himmler that henceforth the women and children should not be shot but dispatched in the gas vans." (Both quotes are from William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.*)

Next, the camera zeroes in on a mountain of suitcases at the museum in Auschwitz. Each suitcase bears the name of its owner, his address, and in some instances the date of his birth. The first suitcase we see belonged to one Mary Kafka. The last one was that of Herman Pasternak.

The Poles: a slim locomotive driver who, fortified by special vodka rations from the Germans, once drove the deportation trains of Jews to the Treblinka death camp, now once again drives a train to the Treblinka station. Upon reaching the station sign he stops, twists his body partway out of the driver's cab, and turns to the Jews who are no longer there. His face resembles that of an old fox; he moves his hand across his throat in a slow gesture of slaughter. All the survivors remember that, at each stop, Polish villagers made the same gesture across their throats at the sight of the packed trains. "We only wanted to warn them," the Polish witnesses explain. But the gesture expresses malice and sadism.

"We went on working as usual in the fields nearby," Czeslaw Borowy, a fat, merry peasant, recalls, and the neighboring farmers confirm his story: "Sometimes we'd hear terrible screams."

"Wasn't it hard for you to work, hearing these terrible screams?" Claude Lanzmann asks.

"You get used to it. You can get used to anything."

There were sixty to eighty cars in each transport, Borowy adds. The fat rich Jews from abroad arrived in fancy sleepers. Our Jews, the Polish ones, he says, came hungry and thirsty. They waited inside the cars. They cried and begged for water. Some of them were naked. "Sometimes we gave them a little water to drink. Us. The Poles. It was very dangerous. You could have got killed for doing it."

"Was it cold?"

"It was very cold. Fifteen, twenty degrees below zero."

The train driver with the foxlike features stands pensively in the Treblinka station.

"Why are you sad?" asks Lanzmann.

"Because they killed a lot of people. Now I don't understand anymore how one human being could do this to another human being."

Lanzmann interviews Abraham Bomba, a barber now living in Holon, on a boat near the seashore, with the luxury hotels of Tel Aviv in the background against a dazzling blue sky. "The Jews always dreamed," he says. "They always had this dream that one day the Messiah would come and

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take them to freedom. Even there, in the ghetto, they dreamed about it. I was in the second transport from Czestochowa. I understood right away that this was no good. They're telling us that they're taking us to work, but what kind of work is that, when they're taking old women and babies with us? But there was no choice. A man has to dream. Or to hope. Without that, you can't live. So we believed them anyway."

SS officer Franz Suchomel was not only photographed by a hidden camera, but also recorded, by means of a car with sophisticated listening equipment parked near his house. Lanzmann gave Suchomel a promise, which he did not intend to keep, to protect his anonymity, and he did not bother–rightly–to delete his promise from his film.

"How are you today, Herr Suchomel? How is your heart?"

"Today the weather's actually excellent for me. The barometric pressure is comfortable."

"If you get too emotional, if you don't feel well, give me a sign like this with your hand and we'll take a break."

There is no need for a break: Herr Suchomel does not get too emotional and he feels fine throughout the interview.

"Thank you very much. Everything is fine. When did we arrive at Treblinka? On the eighteenth of August? No? Perhaps the twenty-forth? Ja. Ja. Correct. About the twentieth. They were working full blast to empty out the Warsaw ghetto. They also brought trains full of Jews from France. No. No. That's an exaggeration, there were never more than three trains a day, with three thousand Jews in each one. Approximately. A great many died during the trip; they were crowded, and the others were half dead also. The gas chambers were too small and couldn't keep up with the job. The Jews had to wait. It was hard for them, and also for us. And in the meantime, some of them had guessed what was going to happen to them. Perhaps they heard the motor of the tank whose exhaust piped gas into the chamber, and figured it out. That was before they improved it and switched to Zyklon gas."

"Herr Suchomel, before you arrived there, did you know what Treblinka was?"

"Ach, nein! Ach, Nein! I didn't know. I didn't want to go there. They told me, 'You will just guard the tailors and shoemakers to make sure they do their work properly.' That was the Fuhrer's order, to resettle them. Just as we arrived, they opened the gas chambers and people spilled out like potatoes. Dreadful! Dreadful! Especially the smell was terrible. It smelled for kilometers! Eberele, the camp commandant, telephoned Lublin and said, 'I can't go on like this. We have to take a break. I can't keep up.' Within a day the top commandant, [SS Major Christian] Wirth, arrived. Wirth had much more

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experience–he had been commandant at Belzec before. He saw what was going on–that horror–and he immediately gave orders to stop the transports so they could catch up with the work.

"The bodies were piled up–like that–and we couldn't get rid of them. There was maybe three feet of blood and excrement. Nobody was willing to clean up the filth. Even the Jews preferred to be shot. They felt bad about having to bury their people like that. Finally they brought some kind of long belts and cleaned up the filth. The Jews did it together with the SS. Those were orders. In this instance, the SS men gave a hand, too.

"Treblinka," Suchomel says modestly, "was just a primitive production line, but it was efficient. Remember what I said: primitive but efficient. You can't compare it to Auschwitz. Auschwitz was a factory. But Treblinka also worked well."

The "dirty work" was done by Jews. Filip Müller, a Czech Jew, a member of the Sonderkommando who survived five "selections" in Auschwitz, describes how a "production failure" could hold up the whole process for some time: In one instance, inexperienced workers allowed the ventilation pump of the crematoria to get overheated, and it was necessary to revert to improvised burial in the ground for a while. "Every malfunction could have saved many people. But there were not many malfunctions. They taught us to work very quickly and expertly."

The historian Raul Hilberg says in the film that the Germans made very few innovations. They did invent the gas chambers. That was something new. But almost all the rest was copied from historical precedents: The exclusion of Jews from certain jobs, the ban on intermarriage, the ban on Christian women under the age of forty-five working in Jewish households, the yellow patch with the Star of David, the isolation of the Jews in ghettos. All these had been tried before, by religious and secular authorities during the nearly two thousand years of Christianity. There was a large pool of accumulated knowledge, which the Nazis merely applied with precision and on a large scale. Most of the laws and regulations enacted by the Third Reich, at least until 1939, but even after that, were not original. The image of the Jew in Nazi propaganda was copied from the image of the Jew at the time of Martin Luther. The Nazis became original and creative only at the stage of the "final solution." Here they had to invent, because they had no appropriate precedents.

Since the fourth century, continues Hilberg, Jew-hatred has progressed in stages: 1. You are forbidden to live in our midst as Jews (result: ghettos). 2. You are forbidden to live among us (result: expulsion). 3. You are forbidden to live altogether (result: total annihilation).

Stage Three represented the Nazi innovation. The bureaucracy was

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given only the most generalized directive and was forced to use imagination and originality to deal with the problems: How to organize? How to deceive? How to transport? How to expropriate property? How to finance? How to kill? How to get rid of the bodies?

The Nazi solutions were technical, "gray." But hidden behind the grayness was a brilliant grand scheme: to transport millions of people to their death in the shortest, simplest way possible, by means of a formula based on a carefully calculated and measured dose of deceit, intimidation, and cunning, and on breaking the willpower of the victims so that they would not believe what awaited them and would not be moved to such desperate acts as escape, resistance, or bursts of mass panic. Any display of panic was liable to hinder the process. Therefore, euphemisms had to be used, even in internal documents; explicit expressions had to be censored; innocent encouraging words, such as "resettlement," "job training," "special treatment," "merchandise" had to be chosen. The killing itself was described by classic anti-Semitic metaphors: Cleansing the world of Jews; cleansing the body of parasites; cleansing the Jews of their diseases. (This last metaphor also became widely current among the Jews themselves; Zionists made much use of it.) And so the Jews were taken to be washed, to the shower that would cleanse them so that they might "turn over a new leaf." Deep in their hearts the Jews, too, wanted to be cleansed and to turn over a new leaf. The shower metaphor is thus illumined by sparks of genius, far from the bureaucratic grayness usually attributed to the Nazis. The imagination of the murderers fed on the limited imagination of the murdered. The creative imagination of Hitler, Himmler, Eichmann, and Golovenchik surpassed the imagination of Mary Kafka and Herman Pasternak. The only remains of Kafka and Pasternak were empty suitcases in a heap of baggage.

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* Hannah Arendt argues that evil is not satanic and that we should not attribute to it a lofty, shadowy dimension, a romantic-demonic mysterious magic. In her words, evil is "banal." The Nazi crime had been committed by petty bureaucrats. The killers could have been Everyman, and only technological "mass society" and its impersonal concepts made the achievement of the "final solution" possible. In 1938, Thomas Mann expressed somewhat similar thoughts in an essay with the astonishing title "Brother Hitler." Mann never repeated these words after the outbreak of World War Two.

In Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, there is the following conversation: " 'The idea being,' said Margotte, 'that here is no great spirit of evil. Those people were too insignificant, Uncle. They were just ordinary lower-class people, administrators, small bureaucrats. . . . A mass society does not produce great criminals. . . . It's like instead of a forest with enormous

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trees, you have to think of small plants with shallow roots.' "

Arkin says, "Enough, enough of this Weimar schmaltz. Cut it, Margotte!'

And Uncle Sammler, that Cyclops saved from the killing, says: "The idea of making the century's great crime look dull is not banal. Politically, psychologically, the Germans had an idea of genius. The banality was only camouflage. What better way to get the curse out of murder than to make it look ordinary, boring, or trite? With horrible political insight they found a way to disguise the thing. Intellectuals do not understand. They get their notions about matters like this from literature. They expect a wicked hero like Richard the Third. But do you think the Nazis didn't know what murder was? Everybody (except certain bluestockings) knows what murder is. That is very old human knowledge. The best and purest human beings, from the beginning of time, have understood that life is sacred. To defy that old understanding is not banality. There was a conspiracy against the sacredness of life. Banality is the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish conscience. Is such a project trivial? Only if human life is trivial. This woman professor's [Hannah Arendt] enemy is modern civilization itself. She is only using the Germans to attack the twentieth century. . . . Making use of a tragic history to promote the foolish ideas of Weimar intellectuals."

> No, no: they were definitely
> Human beings: uniforms, boots.
> How shall I explain? They were created
> in God's image.
> I was a shadow.
> I had a different Creator.
> –Dan Pagis, "Slavery," from the collection, *Metamorphosis*

The Polish stationmaster at Sobibor, a man who looks and acts like a pedantic grammar-school teacher, tells in the film how labor details of Jews were first brought in to build the camp. "We thought it would be a sort of labor camp. Early in June, the first transport arrived, accompanied by SS troops in black uniforms. It was in the afternoon just after I had finished work. There were screams and groans in German, crying, whining, a lot of noise. When I came back to work the next morning, it was already absolutely quiet. I had no idea they were involved in the total extermination of all the Jews. I asked myself: Where are they? Where did they put all those Jews? All was quiet. There was an idyllic silence."

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Craig Calhoun

PROTEST IN BEIJING: THE CONDITIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CHINESE STUDENT MOVEMENT OF 1989

Echoes of the past figured prominently in the Chinese student movement of 1989. Students began to take to the streets in growing numbers after the death of Hu Yaobang, the reform-oriented Communist Party General Secretary who had lost his post during the repression of the 1986-87 student protest. Dazibao (large-character posters) mounted on the walls of Beijing University's "triangle area" listed key dates from the May 4th movement of 1919, China's first major student protest movement. The seventieth anniversary of May 4th itself was the occasion of the second really large march of 1989. This year was also the tenth anniversary of the "democracy wall" movement which had brought the first massive voice for democratization in post-Mao China. And the anniversaries went on and on. On May 3d, I sat with a handful of graduate students on the Beijing University campus musing on the fact that their movement, which already was beginning to make them feel part of a historical struggle, came in the year of the fortieth anniversary of the culmination of China's Communist Revolution in the creation of the People's Republic, the two hundredth anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, and perhaps most potently of all, the bicentennial of the French Revolution.

The very scene of this conversation said something about the background to the protest. Of all Chinese universities, Beijing University is perhaps the one which feels most familiar to an American. Its campus was originally that of Harvard's Beijing outreach effort, and it is laid out with quadrangles, spacious lawns, rolling hills, and even a pretty lake. No American arriving there would need more than a moment to realize that he was on a university campus. And in 1989 it looked more familiar than ever. Snazzy ten-speed bicycles were cropping up among the more traditional utilitarian Chinese designs. Students wore polo shirts with brand name logos splashed across their chests. Men and women walked hand in hand. One could buy Coke as well as the local orange sodas. A good number of students had earphones on their heads and "Walkman" stereos on their belts. Oddly, the first thing that struck me as unfamiliar was the very high percentage of students

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who smoked cigarettes–even though many favored brands from my home state of North Carolina.

But there were also subtler changes at work. Beijing University had previously been home to one of my favorite statues of Mao Tse-tung. In front of a central building he had stood, his hands clasped behind his back, facing into the wind, perhaps the wind of change. Though Mao was already dead when I first visited Beijing University, it hadn't occurred to me that this statue would have been toppled by the time I returned. I rather imagined that at worst Mao would simply lose his currency, but his statue remain a landmark–a bit like the Confederate soldier on the front quad of my own university in Chapel Hill. Mao's statue was a casualty, however, not just of shifting political currents but of a deep-seated ambivalence on the part of young Chinese intellectuals towards their past. Not only recent symbols such as Mao but ancient figures of Chinese culture were subject to attack. Students grappled with the challenge of figuring out just what it did and should mean to be Chinese even while accepting certain Western influences and proposing innovations of their own. They had not lost their pride in being Chinese, but it was coupled paradoxically with a humiliation at whatever seemed to have made China weak in the modern world.

Among the bits of Western influence at work in China, of course, were partial stirrings of capitalism. When I gathered with my student friends to talk about the prospects for democracy it was in a privately owned and operated restaurant housed on the University campus. And though there was talk of inflation overall, this restaurant drew praise for providing us more good food than we could eat, and quite enough beer, for the equivalent of a little over a dollar a head. Of course even that was an expensive meal for Chinese students who would ordinarily pay fifty cents or less for a dining hall meal, carrying their own metal dishes with them, and using a spoon rather than chopsticks because it meant a single implement would do for soup and other dishes, and because it wouldn't fall through a mesh bag.

Around the table, my new friends (I had met only one of these students before) praised my handling of chopsticks–a routine sort of compliment for a Chinese to pay a foreigner. They deferentially asked my opinion of and advice for the Chinese student movement though I had but recently arrived. And gradually, after a little prodding, they began to tell me more of what they thought lay ahead. Some expected real democracy in a year or so, others wondered whether they would see it in their lifetime. All did think it inevitable, a matter simultaneously of historical necessity and popular will. They told me that intellectuals had a central role to play as the conscience of the nation and as the source of a new vision of Chinese culture. They relived inspiring moments from the April 27th march when students had broken

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through ranks of unarmed military police to reach Tiananmen Square, revealing the government to be unwilling to enforce the threats of violent repression it had made the day before. They speculated on tactical questions: Should the planned May 4th march be the last before a consolidation of gains or one moment in a rising wave of protest? Would the return of Zhao Ziyang from North Korea bring them an important friend in power or end the apparent indecision of the government? How could the ideas of the students best be spread to other sections of the population? They argued among themselves over theoretical questions. They joked about the danger of repression, laughing at the undergraduates who had made wills before marching on Tiananmen against government orders on April 27th.

Within six weeks, these students would have experienced peaks of exhilaration as their movement grew beyond the scale of their short-term hopes, troughs of depression as it seemed to falter, lacking strong leadership or sense of direction, and rage as soldiers following government orders killed thousands of fellow protesters. By mid-June, some of these students would have fled Beijing to the relative safety of family and friends in smaller towns. Others would be attending hours of "political study" sessions each week, confessing the number of times they had joined demonstrations, resisting calls to inform on friends, studying the speeches of Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng. All would have been silenced, at least for the near future.

Chinese critics of the communist regime are fond of comparing it to its imperial predecessors, pointing out what they call its 'feudal' aspects. This is in some ways a problematic characterization, born largely of a crude appropriation of the already simplified historical categories of *The Communist Manifesto*. The particularities of traditional China are poorly grasped by lumping it together with medieval Europe, and feudalism was only an aspect, however important, of European social organization. It had seemed both a cheap shot and an analytic error for people to say (as the Taiwanese government was especially fond of claiming) that Mao was just China's newest emperor. Blaming the communist system's current difficulties on lingering feudalism was also a version of critical analysis which parts of the government could endorse, as it challenged not their policy declarations but only premature claims of success. Blaming feudalism actually shifted the critique away from a more fundamental analysis of the problems in the current regime.

Nonetheless, in 1989 the government did seem to share a good many continuities with traditional China. Students pointed, for example, to the old men struggling to cling to power. Crises of imperial succession were the bane of traditional China. Because each emperor ruled until his death, nearly every transition was marked by a power struggle. As a ruler grew old, his

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generals, staff, and potential heirs began jockeying for position, usually creating a period of increasing instability which often culminated in a full-scale crisis after the emperor's death. Something similar had occurred after the death of Mao Tse-tung. Deng Xiaoping had set out to avoid this pattern. He had maneuvered his fellow octogenarians into full or partial retirement, elevating a 'younger' generation (mainly in its sixties) to power, but appeared unwilling to give up having the final say on every important policy decision. In 1987 he had engineered the removal of his long-time protege and designated heir, Hu Yaobang, when the latter had acted too independently and with too much willingness to see economic reform extended into politics. Of course he was to do the same in 1989.

Beyond the specifics of Deng's power, students commented on the average age of the party elite as itself an indication of China's failure to modernize. They felt this keenly, as it meant that they would have to wait decades following the dictates of their elders rather than their hearts or minds–before they could have a substantial voice in the highest levels of policy-making. This was one of the sources of Gorbachev's popularity. Not only was the Soviet leader relatively young, he appeared to listen to and promote still younger voices. A bit of the same had happened in China, to be sure. A few younger economists, especially, had been catapulted to great prominence. A Western graduate education in some cases helped to overcome youth and rapidly accelerate a career.

In the spring of 1989, a few people went beyond raising questions about the age of party leaders, and beyond wondering about who would succeed Deng. Perhaps, they suggested, China was experiencing not just a succession of emperors but of dynasties. Perhaps the communist regime would turn out to be just one of China's short-lived dynasties, a reign of decades like the Sui or Yuan rather than of a thousand years as the traditional benediction has it. Chinese dynasties are thought to have a natural life course: strong and sometimes expanding in their youth, stable and peaceful in middle age, increasingly prone to crises and instability as they grow old. Was communism growing old?

Most students had little sense that any short-term changes were going to end the People's Republic of China. The majority did not even contemplate overturning the Communist Party. They did however see the government as weakening. And whether the succession crisis was large or small, it seemed to play a significant role. The ordinary work of the government was hampered by loss of discipline, increasing corruption, and the distraction of factional struggles. The latter were not just between "hardliners" and "reformers" but among a wide range of different groups. While most such groups had ideological positions, these were not necessarily their basis. Many

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were constructed out of personal loyalties, including kinship, while others were marriages of convenience. Alliances cross-cut each other, and boundaries shifted. Little of this struggle went on in public–or even in full view of the party elite. While it consumed more and more attention, it also made even highly placed people more and more uneasy and uncertain of just what sort of government–and ideological line–would prevail.

The divisions in government did not all come from the succession crisis, of course: it merely made it difficult to resolve them or paper them over. Differing views of the economic reforms of the past decade, the struggle among generations, relations between military and civilian leaders, debate over the extent of permissible Westernization and attempts to stem some of the high level corruption were all factors undermining government unity.

Whatever the outcome, a key impact of the growing concern over succession was the near-incapacitation of the government when faced with the growing student protest and the evident sympathy much of the broader public felt for it. The movement cannot be understood in terms of its own grievances or organizational strengths, but has to be seen as flowering in an opening provided by the internal divisions and relative weakness of the government.

In the spring of 1989, Chinese people frequently pointed to the troubles in the economy: inflation was growing, there were periodic shortages of important products, some goods and services could be gotten only by bribery, wages were inequitable at best and often low in absolute terms. Students repeatedly bemoaned their own poverty, which was very real by American standards, and pointed out that even the most senior professors (along with engineers, doctors, and other intellectuals and professionals) made but a fraction of what a taxi driver received. At the same time, though the students did not always recognize it, they were much better off than students a few years before. Bicycles were not in short supply, though most students' bicycles were rather beat up (some told me they left their fancier ten speeds at home, afraid they would stand out at the university and be stolen). In Beijing, most students had radios, many had stereos, a few had televisions in their dormitory rooms. Undergraduates were crowded four to six to a room, but nearly all ate adequately and owned a few books. A good many had cameras with which to photograph their favorite Dazibao (some had fancy Japanese 35 mm. SLRs); this was different from the China of the early 1980s, when a tourist might draw a crowd just by changing a roll of film. Students also had tape recorders to preserve memorable speeches during the demonstrations, and leaders found it easy to buy battery-operated megaphones to be heard. In short, even students, who had not shared in much of China's recent economic gains, were noticeably better off than they

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had been five years before.

The gains were much more pronounced for other groups. There were the getihu, the small entrepreneurs whose stalls filled free markets and a good many sidewalks, some of whom made enough money to be above manning a stall. Some, indeed, owned motorcycles and patronized the better restaurants. Of course, some also failed, though this side of capitalism did not seem to be clear, and many assumed that to be an entrepreneur itself meant to be wealthy. The employees of joint venture companies from hotels to textile factories, and to electronics assembly plants, could earn at least double the national average. Peasants had benefited largely from the right to raise animals and to market some of their crops. There were also an increasing number of millionaires; some of the senior managers in the growing "big business" sector, such as the founders of the Stone Computer Corporation, China's largest privately owned company, which even operated its own think tank, had good salaries. Deng Ziaoping's slogan, "to get rich is glorious" had not been ignored.

In the last two years, however, many of the gains had been eroded. The economy had stagnated. Peasants had been paid for their main crops (still purchased by the government) only partly in cash and partly in a not immediately negotiable scrip. Inflation had eaten up much of the extra earnings of urban workers. The implementation of market prices in some areas and regulation in others was responsible for numerous imbalances. Lightbulbs were in short supply, for example, because tungsten was sold at (relatively high) market prices, while lightbulbs themselves had to be sold at a low regulated price. In the countryside, the rush to purchase consumer goods had reportedly slowed. The government scrip and consequent shortage of cash was not the only reason. Peasants had also begun to save for traditional purposes such as weddings and funerals. (In July 1989 the government launched a crackdown on such practices, ostensibly because of their "superstitious" religious foundations but also because of the economic impact of keeping large amounts of money out of circulation.)

Even though economic growth had brought problems with it, the student and popular protest of the spring cannot be understood without noting that economic gains were genuine. First, many of the popular complaints, including most notably corruption, inflation, and inequities in income distribution, were products of the economic reforms. Second, the economic changes helped to open up other possibilities. Economic motives had helped to engender growing Western influences through tourism (hard currency), joint ventures (capital and technology), and education abroad (skills). Beyond this, economic reforms had fueled a burgeoning market in publications, for example, and a sense that opportunities to advance one's career were not limited to currying

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favor with the Communists Party or one's immediate supervisors (though there were still sharp limits to how free from one's danwei or unit one could become). Third, and centrally, the very economic ambitions of the Party and government made them reliant on highly educated workers, professionals, scientists, and scholars.

A very wide range of people are categorized by the Chinese term translated as "intellectual"–that is, nearly everyone with a university education. Deng Xiaoping and all the other proponents of economic "modernization" needed them. This realization had to contend, however, with the ambivalence which the leadership of the Communist Party and for that matter the people of China had always shown toward intellectuals.

In traditional China, intellectuals were respected masters of Confucian thought, calligraphy, and classical Chinese style. Yet, scholars were either local gentry or imperial bureaucrats or both. Westernization perpetuated this ambivalence. Intellectual ranks grew, but in the role as purveyors of Western culture made others uneasy. The struggle to respond to the challenge of Western economic and military power helped to rouse reform-oriented intellectual movements which might be seen as the first stirrings of the formation of a nationwide intellectual class independent of the government; on the other hand, the official intellectuals of the bureaucracy by and large proved themselves inadequate to the challenge of reforming their own administration and strengthening China. Thousands of intellectuals returned from study abroad to help build a new China after the 1949 Revolution. Most, however, were treated with suspicion from the start and attacked repeatedly in campaigns of rectification and anti-rightism and ultimately the Cultural Revolution. Though Mao himself was an intellectual of a sort, a proud author of classical poetry, he was unwilling to encourage such activities in others.

Deng Xiaoping, by contrast, had fewer intellectual pretensions but was much readier to grant intellectuals a central place. As the main agent in ending and undoing the Cultural Revolution, he was deeply revered by many Chinese intellectuals. In 1984, for example, students told me how he had personally saved them from bleak years of working with (and in some cases being tormented by) the peasants, how he had brought a large dose of meritocratic decision-making to a university admissions process which had been dominated by political, class and other non-intellectual criteria. Hundreds of professors had been restored to their senior university positions; writers had been able to publish again; scientists had returned to their laboratories.

But as the 1980s and the reforms progressed, two partially correlated tensions began to develop. The first was a split between two sorts of intellectuals. On the one side were technocrats who worked in engineering, demography, econometrics, or other applied sciences to try to modernize

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China. On the other side were more "humanistic" or "cultural" scholars who increasingly worried about the absence of a real vision of being Chinese in this era of reform. The government, of course, was much more interested in the first group, many of whose members rapidly rose in the academic hierarchy. This left the second group not only more concerned than ever for China's soul and future direction, but more and more unhappy with its own position.

The second tension was with the government itself. As intellectuals gained in stature and numbers, they began to push for further liberalizations or even to attack the government. Scientists as well as humanists were in the forefront: one of the most visible figures was the astrophysicist and university administrator Fang Lizhi. But writers, literary scholars, and others who engaged in a massive rethinking of China's history and culture all played a central role. Some, like the prominent journalist Liu Binyan, tried hard to stay within the bounds of party loyalty; others did not.

Fang Lizhi and other dissidents spoke directly of democracy and civil liberties. Many cultural thinkers addressed the sense of national humiliation, lack of direction and "malaise" they identified in China. Both sorts of writings and teachings helped to pave the way for the student protest movement. In the minds of many students, they blurred together. Democracy was not just a preferable form of government but the symbolic answer to China's wounded cultural pride and economic backwardness.

By 1989, students focused on these tensions. Still, a genuine liberalization had taken place. The repression of the 1986-87 dissent had been mild. Publishing was far more open than it had been during the first three decades of the People's Republic. Above all, the increasingly vital intellectual life led Chinese students and intellectuals to cast themselves as the conscience of the country.

The student protest movement of April to June began with a focus on intellectuals' concerns. In a sense, it was part of a process of intellectual class formation begun at the turn of the century, pushed forward especially in 1919, and interrupted by the communist revolution. But the student movement eventually made connections to a wider range of people, through its condemnation of corruption. And people who primarily were concerned with economics responded to the students' initiative in confronting the government. At its core, however, this remained a student movement, interested primarily in such civil liberties as freedom of speech, publication and assembly. These were pursued not just out of selfishness, but out of a sense that China needed the advice which intellectuals had to offer.

The immediate occasion for the movement was the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15th. Hu had been head of the Communist Party during

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the last Chinese student protests of 1986-87, and had been dismissed for not controlling the movement more forcefully. This had made him a sort of martyr, even though he was by no means an advocate of everything the students had stood for. Rather, somewhat like Zhao Ziyang, he was a reformer and a proponent of changes pending on the goodwill and participation of China's intellectuals. Hu was not mourned with a deep outpouring of sentiment, such as that shown for Zhao Enlai; rather, his death provided a pretext for demonstrations which had their roots elsewhere. Students carried pictures of Hu, and no doubt there were sincere regrets at his death and some suspicion about its causes (he died of a heart attack during a Politburo meeting). But the signs are better understood as part of a carefully aimed message for Deng Xiaoping and the hard-liners of the Communist Party.

As students took to the streets in growing numbers after April 15th, this message was heard quite clearly by Deng and the other leaders. Students were telling them they disapproved of their leadership and particularly of their failure to listen more to students and intellectuals. The pictures of Hu disappeared from the student demonstrations, for the most part, after May 4th. The messages of disapproval and the demand for a public voice became ever stronger.

May 4th itself had been touted as a major demonstration, but was lacking in novelty and drama. There was neither the confrontation of the April 27th march nor the dramatic effect of hunger strikes or the statue of liberty. Before these were introduced, the movement briefly went into low gear. Students returned to classes for a week, celebrated their success and waited to see what the government would do. The government offered a dialogue with Yuan Mu, spokesman for the Council of State. Since the government was not in the habit of discussing policy issues with students this was an achievement. But Yuan Mu was not very senior, rather too smooth for most tastes (partly because he was a better television performer than his interlocutors), and unwilling to get very deeply into what the students considered the key issues.

Things heated up again with the start of the hunger strike on May 12th and 13th and Gorbachev's visit to Beijing from May 15th to 18th. The largest of all the demonstrations was held on May 17th, with more than a million people crowding Tiananmen Square and the approach roads. At midnight on May 19th, after Gorbachev had left for Shanghai, the government declared martial law, with Li Peng making the announcement in a particularly poorly delivered (and received) speech. Ironically, that very evening student leaders had decided to end the hunger strike; some even were calling for withdrawal from the Square. Had the government waited a few hours, confrontation might have been avoided. That it occurred is testimony to the lack

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of communication.

As heavy news coverage showed the world, the imposition of martial law was a failure. Troops were met on the periphery of Beijing by "ordinary people" (laobaixing) who took it upon themselves to act as citizens rather than the government's masses. As the story was repeated by surprised and deeply moved students, it seemed that in every neighborhood it was an old woman who placed herself in front of troop trucks, saying they would have to run her over if they were to move against the protesting students. Buses and bicycle barriers were drawn across the road to serve as barricades; troops were at least unwilling if not precisely unable to move forward against such opposition. Having been kept in the dark about the nature of events in Beijing and apparently the purpose of their own maneuvers, they seemed bewildered and chagrined by the popular resistance. They were greeted as friends by the crowds, but denied privacy and subjected to never-ending "education" about the current situation.

From May 20th to June 2d, to live in Beijing was to ride an emotional roller coaster. Popular participation in protest ebbed and flowed. At first, people stayed up all night on barricades, waiting to defend the city against the army. The Paris Commune sprang not only to my mind but to those of locals, especially older ones who had read a bit more Marx than today's students. Of course people grew tired, and the immediate military threat seemed to pass. Rumors spread of both popular victory and an imminent crackdown; a military coup and a siege of the city. As the apparent stalemate continued, eyes turned towards the internal power struggles of the government. Would Zhao Ziyang lead reformers to a new and secure dominance? Or would the old guard and its proteges such as Premier Li Peng oust the others as too sympathetic to students, capitalism, and the West? As crowds shrank, the movement appeared to be weakening. As before, leaders discussed the possibility of unilaterally declaring victory and putting the strategic ball back in the government's court. However, they could not reach agreement on this, perhaps because there seemed no way to withdraw from the Square without appearing to have weakened or lost resolve. On May 26th the erection of the "Goddess of Democracy" statue gave the movement a new focal point and new energy.

By then, students from outside Beijing outnumbered those from the cities' own universities. And much of the time, especially in the final days before the massacre, students were outnumbered by others, mostly young male workers, many (I was told) unemployed. They gave the crowd a much surlier tone and greatly diminished the student activists' ability to maintain order and a peaceful response to military provocation.

New troops had been brought to Beijing; the rumor spread that they

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were from Inner Mongolia and spoke little or no Putonghua (common people's language, Mandarin, or standard dialect). Be that as it may, those face to face with students outside Zhongnanhai compound or the railroad station showed little interest in talking–or in being harangued by the protesters. The government succeeded in getting a substantial number to at least three locations in proximity to the Square: Zhongnanhai (the capacious official resident of most top party leaders, though they had apparently left Beijing during the period of attempted imposition of martial law), the central railroad station, and the old Imperial Palace Museum–the Forbidden City. On the mornings of June 2d and June 3d troops went jogging around the Square and otherwise advertised their presence. Later on the 3d, a few thousand advanced on the crowd, but without firing guns. They were repulsed with light fighting; skirmishes continued throughout the day. Tear gas was used at least once, at the gate to Zhongnanhai, but not widely. Troops beat protesters with belts and truncheons; the crowd fought back with limbs pulled from the trees along Chang'an Boulevard. Though violence never entirely subsided, the troops were kept at bay (to what must have been their growing frustration) and the conflicts were confined enough that families came out to enjoy a popsicle and the entertainment the fighting offered. Around seven p.m., I bought a crepe from a street vendor less than three hundred yards from a barricade behind the Great Hall of the People where troops still challenged protesters, occasionally flailing away with belts.

Around 8:30 that evening, troops quartered in the southwest of Beijing began to move towards Tiananmen Square. They encountered strong resistance along Fuxingmen and Chang'an Boulevards (different sections of the same street), especially in the Muxudi district about two miles from the Square. They fired on demonstrators and drove their vehicles into crowds and over barricades. Occasionally, when a tank was stuck struggling over a bicycle that had been pulled into the road, protesters ran out and stuck iron bars into its tracks; those which were disabled were often torched, usually after the occupants had been given a chance to escape (though this did not necessarily spare them a beating). According to eye witnesses, thousands had already been killed before the troops or the other column moving in from the East reached Tiananmen Square. There the advancing troops were joined by those from the Forbidden City routing the remainder of the students and other protesters.

For two days after this massacre, everyone was in a state of shock. Some retreated to their homes. Others scurried about the town, trying to get a clearer sense of what had happened. Hospitals were overflowing with wounded. Sporadic shooting continued. Throughout an unusually hazy Sunday afternoon and much of Monday, columns of smoke rose from burning

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vehicles; occasionally an explosion indicated that another had been set on fire. We were all uncertain what would happen next. The possibility of civil war was discussed, particularly as it appeared that the 38th army might oppose the 27th which had perpetrated the massacre. By June 7th it was clear that this was not going to happen. The government began to recompose itself, the hard-liners and their associates to consolidate victory over more liberal Party forces.

The writing of an official history began with the transformation of soldiers who had died during the invasion into martyrs. It was variously declared that no students had been killed or that the number was small; carefully phrased statements indicated that no one had been shot in Tiananmen Square; dead protesters were described as hooligans, thugs, and troublemakers, not students. Pressure was placed on the public to identify and turn in protest leaders who had gone into hiding, and anyone who had been identified as telling foreign reporters what they thought had actually happened. At least one of these has since been convicted of "rumor-mongering" and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Never has the Orwellian imagery of *1984* seemed more apt. China has both versions of Winston Smith: those who send historical knowledge down the "memory hole" in the service of bureaucratic truth, and those who try to keep alive the simple message that two plus two equals four. This movement has blessed the latter with first-hand knowledge among a wide segment of China's urban population, and with a substantial documentary record, though this is primarily held abroad and not currently available to the Chinese people.

The 1989 student protest lasted only six weeks. Though its roots were old, and some of its ideas had been under intensive discussion for months, its great accomplishment was massive mobilization, not theoretical deepening of Chinese democracy. Essentially, the protesters pursued three sorts of goals; democracy, economic improvement, and an end to corruption. However, democracy was the main concern of university students and intellectuals, but not of most workers. Ordinary people were more interested in economic issues. They all complained about corruption.

When students talked about democracy, they often disappointed Westerners who expected them to place multiparty elections at the top of their priorities. But though many students thought such elections a good thing, civil liberties loomed much larger in their immediate vision of democracy. They were struggling for freedom of expression through speech and the press, freedom of association, especially in their independent students' association, and ultimately for a greater freedom in conducting the affairs of their own lives. As budding intellectuals, they sought to carry on a discourse about the future of China and especially to offer advice to the government and to be

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heard by the government.

Democracy was spoken of, I thought, more as something that people might have than as something they might do. That is, democracy meant having a government which took the interests of its people seriously, acted to their benefit rather than that of its cadres, listened to expressions of popular opinion and was fair. The idea of democracy as a form of political participation was much less well developed. The crucial participations which the students sought to guarantee were extensions of the traditional idea of officials (and to a lesser extent, ordinary people) remonstrating with the emperor, holding him to his responsibilities and telling him what he needed to know in order to be a good ruler. Thus a greater role for intellectuals was central to their vision of democracy. We in America sometimes emphasize the role of elections to the point of forgetting the importance of social movements and other less mechanical forms of democratic participation, particularly in determining which issues will be on the agenda of policy-makers and behind the decisions made in elections. Chinese thinkers have often pointed to both the weaknesses of electoral democracy in the West and the problems of reliance on elections in a backward, under-educated country. Students implicitly postponed questions of universal suffrage to a later stage, after popular consciousness had been raised. They tended to conceive of education as something which they as intellectuals would do to the people, rather than as a direct outgrowth of a participatory political process.

As to the ordinary people, when asked, they certainly declared themselves to be in favor of democracy. But if pressed about their grievances, they stressed economic issues and corruption. They wanted an end to the inflation which ate away at the purchasing power of their relatively fixed salaries. Though not high by third world standards, this inflation was unprecedented in the People's Republic of China. The government had implemented reforms which enabled some people to get rich, and had praised the idea of getting rich, but had not offered a clear rationale for understanding why some would enjoy this opportunity and others would not. Why should teenagers lucky enough to get jobs in a joint-venture hotel make more than the most senior university professors? In short, the economy seemed to lack order; its results did not make sense to ordinary people. This may well have unsettled them even if growth were continuous and inflation nonexistent. But growth had stagnated during the last two years, while inflation had grown. At one level, of course, people simply wanted more wealth, but they also wanted the distribution of wealth to make sense. The Party had abandoned the extreme but clear egalitarianism of its earlier policies, and had not come up with a new legitimating message. In one sense this was ironic, for it is not clear that inequality really had increased: the rise of rural incomes compared

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to urban ones had reduced overall inequality. But changing relations among economic sectors, and new displays of wealth, made people feel inequality acutely.

The sense of economic injustice merged with complaints of corruption–in several senses. First, there was the radical extension and transformation of the traditional reliance on guanxi or connections. Here the issue was not just that people relied on connections more, but that these connections were being reduced to cash transactions. It had always been easier to get an airline ticket, for instance, if you knew someone with a relative in the airline's office. Now people claimed that seats were being held back by strategically placed clerks so that their relatives could act as brokers. Moreover, the payment was cash on the spot, not the expectation that the favor would be returned (perhaps to one's kin, not one's self) or the satisfaction of not being a debtor in this system of cultural credit. The traditional idea of connections was giving way to simple bribery. By far the most frequent version of guanxi was the placement of high party officials' children in the most desirable jobs. It seemed no accident that both Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng had sons working as executives on Hainan Island, one of the new enterprise zones; nearly everyone assumed that these young men had good jobs thanks to their fathers but impunity from prosecution as they skimmed money from local ventures.

But corruption also involved much larger transactions. It was practiced by official units as well as private businessmen. It involved a variety of under the table *quid pro quos*–padded payrolls, attempted price manipulations, toleration of inferior quality concrete in return for a bribe, demanding foreign exchange certificates for work which should have been paid in domestic currency. It is hard to know if its extent was unusually high, though everyone seemed sure that it had grown. The high proportion of government businesses made it likely that such shady antics would be seen as official corruption rather than simply the result of capitalist innovation.

The government's economic role also produced the third sort of corruption, a kind of semi-benign version of the second: reducing but not eliminating detailed central economic planning created a variety of imbalances. Vital goods might be in short supply in one region while another had an excess, but either documents or cash for transactions was lacking. A number of businessmen moved into the breach as black market deal makers, fixers who helped overcome the contradictions of the system. They might organize a barter arrangement which linked three regions each with too much of something another wanted. They might arrange the sale of goods at a price triple the official one, with only the controlled price reported. Though people resented the fortunes made in this way, this was not the sort of corruption on which they focused. They did, however, tend to see the whole mercantile

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practice of buying cheap and selling dear as shady.

As exhilarating and unexpected as the success of the student protest movement was, it is important to recognize some of the issues which were inadequately faced and problems which remained unsolved. The first and most important was simply that this was a movement of urban people with almost no resonance in or connections to the countryside. This is not to say that China's rural population is without grievances or uncritically supportive of all government policy. It is not. But word of the protest spread less in the countryside than in the cities, and primarily through official government media. And few peasant children go to universities, so that the informal communications network which spread unofficial and insider views of the protest did not work effectively in rural areas. Links between students and peasants also were inhibited by class bias. Students in the April 27th march shouted to soldiers: "Farmers go home; you have no business here." Farmers in China as elsewhere have suspicions about "city slickers." Moreover, some of the complaints and interests of urban and rural populations pitted them at least superficially against each other as consumers versus producers. Higher food prices (even in the form of an end to the scrip payments by which peasants were forced to loan money to the government) would have furthered the inflation which worried urban people.

Students and urban workers found common cause in the protests, but few organizational linkages united them. Though the idea of sending delegations to visit factories, or of forming a joint student-worker committee, were sometimes mentioned, little action was taken. Occasionally activists mentioned the model of Poland's Solidarity movement. This was a popular idea. But Solidarity is rooted in stronger, more independent workplace organizations than exist in China. It was enhanced by linkages between intellectuals and the workers'movement in which the intellectuals did not completely preempt the leadership positions. Polish society has more arenas free from close state supervision than China. And in China there is no institution like the Polish Catholic Church to link together urban and rural populations.

The student movement also was hampered by internal difficulties. One was a weakness of decision-making capacity. Western reporters (like the Chinese government in the course of its repression) often exaggerated the role of centralized leadership in organizing the movement. In fact, leadership was diffuse. Different contingents of demonstrators acted with some autonomy, guided by constant observation of each other rather than by directives from a hierarchy of leaders. This did not prevent a high level of organization, but it made the implementation of decisions difficult.

The occupation of Tiananmen Square had provided the movement with a setting at once neutral (not confined to anyone campus) and central. It

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became a forum for discourse, and every night leaders met to discuss tactical and logistic issues. But those discussions were hampered by the attempt to make decisions by consensus. This became a major issue when proposals to withdraw from Tiananmen Square began to be put forward by the most prominent leaders of the movement. Accounts differ on whether majority opinion actually favored staying when Wu'erkaixi, Wang Dan, and Chai Ling were voted down on May 21st, or whether a substantial minority simply indicated that it would not leave. In any case, it was clear that a complete and orderly withdrawal could not be achieved. To leave a few behind was thought of as weakening to the movement, and so the students stayed (ostensibly all of them, though in fact a good many simply drifted away until the statue of the Goddess of Democracy rekindled enthusiasm a few days later). On many occasions different student groups spent hours in debate about the right course of action, without establishing procedures to make clear decisions to move ahead. I had to remind myself that they had not been ingrained with the two hundred years of experience of majority votes which has made such procedures almost second nature to us.

Closely related to this lack was the fact that the students generally did not have a strong conception, still less a habit of pluralistic public discourse. They favored pluralism in the sense that they wanted their voices to be heard and not squashed by the government. But internally they felt a strong need to speak unanimously. They sought to be the "voice of the people" and understood themselves as speaking ideally for the country as a whole. They did not consider that there might be competing but equally right views of a situation or solutions to a problem. Though they tried to respect minorities, they did not see the nurturing of an internal discourse across lines of significant difference as itself one of the goals of their movement. As a result, student activists occasionally complained that movement leaders behaved towards them just as the government behaved towards the people. Certainly leaders made no systematic effort to ascertain the views of ordinary movement participants. They reached their own conclusions, announced them, and then hoped that they would be followed. When they were not, they felt abandoned and tended to withdraw.

Finally, the movement was weakened by its lack of communications media. This was both an internal problem and especially a limit to the movement's ability to reach the country as a whole. Most information flowed by word of mouth. Students used telephones and printed handbills, but they did not have their own newspaper or journals. For an exhilarating week in mid-to-late May Chinese newspapers and television began to report events as they happened. The BBC and Voice of America broadcasts were a crucial source of news on China, but the students lacked the capacity to disseminate

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very widely their own version of events in Beijing. Though some student groups, sensitive to the historic importance of these events, tried to keep archives, the movement did not generate a mass of documentation. Journalists and other observers, overseas Chinese, and activists who escaped will play the most important role in recording what went on. This is a key advantage to the government in its effort to rewrite history.

Ironically, it is perhaps easier to sum up the movement's accomplishments than to note its weaknesses and limits. Certainly, it feels better. Future movements will have to contend with the issues this one found difficult to resolve. But whatever its shortcomings, the student protest movement of 1989 did score startling successes.

It will play a continuing role in Chinese history, I think, simply as an inspiration. This will be augmented by the memory that workers, students, and intellectuals found a sense of common cause. Moreover, the growth of the movement and the failure of the government's initial attempt to impose martial law combine to show that the Chinese government is not all-powerful. Ideological and factional disunity, the imminence of a succession crisis, and the absence of a clear vision of where it should head all made it hard for the government to take effective action. People will look for such opportunities in the future.

The success of the movement also showed that however "totalitarian" the Chinese government might aspire to be (and the label fit the first three decades of the People's Republic better than it fit most of Eastern Europe), it did not succeed completely in removing the distinction between state and society. In 1989, after a decade of reform, the action was of enormous magnitude. It is unlikely that all the institutions which have begun to emerge as civil society's basis for a public sphere will be eliminated during the current repression. Indeed, the dominant factions in the government seem intent enough on pursuing economic modernization that it probably will not even try.

Finally, the effects of repression itself should be chalked up to the historic importance of the student movement. By finding it necessary to act with such force, and to turn back much of the progress of reform, the government revealed the weakness of its own position. It is quite likely that this weakness stemmed largely from internal division. Whatever its source, it led the dominant factions in government to abandon a decade's worth of image polishing, not only abroad but at home. The ferocity of the massacre has acted powerfully to delegitimize the Chinese government. Perhaps almost as significantly, the People's Liberation Army has been tarred with the same brush. Until the very end of the protest, students chanted "the People's Liberation Army loves the people, the people love the People's Liberation

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Army." Over and over I was told, "The army will not fire on the Chinese people." This is a message the people will not easily believe again.

The Chinese government has found it necessary to rule its own capital city and the elite of its own children substantially by force rather than consent. This does not mean that its grip on the nation as a whole is so weak that its demise is imminent. It does mean that its legitimacy and strength are seriously damaged. It will have to repair them, or govern less, or devote more resources to the mere maintenance of control.

Coming in

Partisan Review:

- Tsvetan Todorov on Intellectuals
- Raymond Aron: *A Memoir*
- Julia Kristeva on the French Revolution
- William Phillips: *The Function of Criticism Today*
- Jed Perl on Salvador Dali
- A. B. Yehoshua: *The Israeli Novel*
- Edith Kurzweil on the Freudians
- Stanley Kauffmann: *Album of My Germany*
- Stanislaw Baranczak on Joseph Brodsky
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- Clancy Sigal: *Hello, I Must Be Going*
- Nathan Glazer on Life in the Bronx

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Tsvetan Todorov

THE DEFLECTION OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The history of European thought over the past two centuries–and, by the same token, the history of Europe itself–contains something of an enigma. To evoke it, we need to recall a few well-known facts. In the course of the eighteenth century, a doctrine emerged which was the combined result of a secularization of Christian ethics and the first victories of rationalism. This doctrine proposed a twofold ideal which may still be considered valid today, and on which a defense of human rights the world over can be based: on the one hand, the acknowledgment of the equal rights of all human beings, rooted in the fact that they belong to the same species, and, on the other, the acceptance of a plurality of cultures–or more exactly the claim that no one culture is a priori superior to the others. Such was the humanist ideal which, in France, was crystallized by the writings of Montesquieu and Rousseau. Though not unanimously endorsed, it was gradually to carry the adhesion of Europe's best minds; later, it would serve as ideological ferment for both the American and the French revolutions, thus coming to be associated with the birth of modern democratic states–which is to say, the majority of European countries.

Such, then, was the "input" around 1750. However, taking a look two centuries later at the "output" –the characteristic features of recent European history–we cannot help but be unpleasantly surprised. For between these two dates there have been sanguinary national wars within Europe, conquests and colonial exploitations in the rest of the world, and the appearance of two distinct totalitarian systems–immense machines of repression and extermination which gave rise to some of the most horrendous events in human memory. How is it possible to account for the jarring contrast between such promising intentions and such disastrous results–between so generous a theory and so deplorable a practice?

Two hypotheses have been advanced here: according to the first, the Enlightenment cannot be held responsible for the catastrophes that ensued, for it was vanquished in turn by that newcomer known as Romanticism–which alone is to blame for all the subsequent misery. According to the second, the Enlightenment itself is guilty: by virtue of a diabolical dialectic, the

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initially generous project could only lead to tragic results. Which of these two hypotheses is correct? Or should we search for yet a third?

I was led to think over these questions in the course of reading for a project to which I have devoted the past several years–an inquiry into French attitudes towards the recognition of others. I use this phrase as shorthand to designate the different types of problems raised by the relationships between members of different cultures (and countries). My goal was to determine what responses had been advanced to the crucial question of how to reconcile human unity with cultural diversity. How is this double appurtenance experienced and expressed? To clarify my thinking on this subject, I undertook to read the major French authors who have dealt with it in their writings over the past three centuries. Today, in order to cast some light on the "enigma" I mentioned at the outset, I shall evoke the examples of three of the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth century: Renan, Michelet, and Chateaubriand.

Let us first take the case of Renan, who has been qualified as the official thinker of the Third Republic: professor at the College de France, member of the Academie Francaise, and a universally admired writer. At first glance, Renan seems to have been a faithful disciple of Rousseau; in actuality, he was instrumental in transforming the humanism of the Enlightenment into a quite different philosophical position–namely, scientism. The first difference between humanism and scientism involves the antinomy between freedom and determinism. Montesquieu and Rousseau recognized the causal effects of both the physical conditions peculiar to a given country (whether it was an island or a continent, mountainous or flat, whether its climate was hot or cold) and its historical and cultural conditions (traditions, customs, religion). However, above and beyond these givens, they considered the very ability to overcome them to be the distinctive trait of the human species; thus, freedom was more powerful than determinism. It is no accident that this concept paved the way for revolutions–that is, historical moments in which people attempt to take their destinies into their own hands.

Renan seems to be defending the same point of view when, in his famous lecture entitled "What Is a Nation?" he defines the latter entity by the desire of individuals to belong to it–a nation, according to his expression, is "a daily-renewed plebiscite." That, at least, is what is usually remembered of this speech. On rereading it, however, one notices that, to this first "criterion" for deciding who belongs to a nation, Renan adds a second, whose effect is to annul the first–namely, the existence of a past history common to all members of the nation. Whereas the desire to build a future together depends on will and therefore on human freedom, the past is a phenomenon over which individuals have no control: rather than acting, they are acted

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upon–thus, determinism neutralizes the effects of freedom.

A similar shift can be observed in Renan's reflections on race. He condemns the biological determinism propounded by contemporary thinkers on the subject such as Gobineau, saying that human populations are by now too intermingled for us to accurately determine the effect of any particular "blood," and that, in any case, language and culture have a far greater influence on behavior than physical make-up. However, what Renan is actually criticizing here is not determinism per se but the type of determinism invoked: he would rather it be cultural than biological, but its action is no less decisive for all that. "All the findings of modern science lead us to consider each race as being confined to a given type which it may or may not fully realize, but from which it cannot break free." Though the word race is to be taken here in a moral rather than a physical sense, it nonetheless implies that Kant and Goethe were already present in the soul of primitive Teutons, and that Africans can never attain the summits of civilization.

In accordance with its basic principle, the triumph of freedom over determinism, humanism refuses to subordinate what ought be to what is–and, therefore, ethics to science (whether the latter is labelled "biology" or "history"). Renan also takes care to distinguish between the two, if only to ensure that science has cast off the shackles of religion. He adds the following observation, however: in modern times, science is advancing at a stupefying rate; religion, morals, and metaphysics, on the other hand, are constantly losing ground. Given this–and the fact that events are in any case entirely predetermined by the interaction of their constituent forces–is it not self-evident that we should ask science rather than ethics to dictate our behavior? To take the particular example of race: both Christian and humanitarian morality would have it that all races deserve the same respect; science, on the other hand (and for Renan, this means history rather than biology) "proves" that the darker races are inferior to the the lighter ones, and that, within the latter, the Semites are inferior to the Indo-Europeans. What attitude should one adopt in the face of this disagreement? One has no choice but to submit to factual necessity–that is to say, the verdict of science; Renan utters not so much as a word of regret for the "half-savage" races exterminated by the passage of the Aryans, and envisages the future destruction of the "Semitic phenomenon" with the utmost calm. Here, ethics are subordinate to science–that is the second point on which scientism is at odds with humanism.

It is not, however, the last. Whereas, for Enlightenment philosophers, reason had to break free from religious faith, Renan's scientism leads to the eventual reconciliation of reason and faith–with science, the emblem of rationality, itself becoming the object of a cult. As of his very first book, *The*

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Future of Science, Renan clearly formulates his intention to inculcate "faith into reason." Thus, rather than being used to combat faith, rationality is itself an article of faith. Throughout his life, Renan was to maintain the same world-view and the same objectives: describing himself as a new type of priest, he never tired of repeating that science would lead to the only true resurrection: "the world improved through science will be the kingdom of the spirit, and bring about the reign of the sons of God." Like Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte before him (though he held the latter thinkers in contempt), Renan ends up refuting his own point of departure, transforming into a religion what he originally presented as a liberation from religion.

Let us now turn to Michelet, that great French historian of the nineteenth century, held in high esteem by Renan and himself an admirer of the principles of the French Revolution. Michelet was the first major spokesman of that strange ideological hybrid known as republican nationalism. Of what does it consist? Enlightenment philosophy, after having brought to light the crucial distinction between patriotism and cosmopolitanism, between love of one's country and love of humanity,had pointed out that these two attitudes were in conflict–often only potentially, but sometimes quite openly–and concluded that, should one be obliged to choose between them, preference should be afforded the universal over the particular. "If I knew of some action which would be advantageous to my nation but ruinous to another, I would not recommend it to my prince, for I am a man before I am a Frenchman," wrote Montesquieu; and Rousseau concurred: the citizen comes after the man. The revolutionaries of 1789 were familiar with these distinctions; however, since it was incumbent upon them to direct the political affairs of a particular country–France–they had to seek to satisfy particular interests. These contradictory aspirations can be discerned in the very title of the first Declaration of Rights, that dealing with the rights "of Man and Citizen" – a profoundly anti-Rousseauist appellation, though its authors surely intended the contrary. How can one manage to reconcile these incompatible requirements? Michelet will be helpful in answering this question, as he rendered explicit what the very protagonists of the Revolution left implicit.

As of his first major work, the *Introduction to Universal History,* Michelet prepares for this tour de force by postulating the equivalence between France and the universe (and thus, potentially, between French patriotism–such as his–and humanitarianism): "This little book," he announces on the first page, "might also have been entitled *Introduction to the History of France;* for it culminates with France." In what way is France identical with the universe? Since the Revolution (and, in fact, even long before), France has based its identity on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity–which, it goes without saying, are universal values par excellence. This

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tradition, adds Michelet in his *History of France*, in fact extends all the way back to the Galles, a race whose most salient characteristic was mobility, flexibility–in a word, liberty, or again, perfectibility. Thus, the trait Rousseau had described as being distinctive of the human species–its ability to acquire knowledge and to perfect itself–here becomes a specifically French trait. Embodying everything most human in humanity, France is that contradiction in terms knows as a "universal fatherland." Michelet goes on to declare that he prefers his patriotism to other people's humanitarianism; but, to demonstrate the former's superiority, he relies on arguments drawn from the latter! This allows him to see every characteristic of the French nation as a manifestation of its universality, and thus as intrinsically valuable. France's vocation is to "usher all other nations into liberty," to "deliver the world" –in effect, France is a planetary midwife.

The possibility of simultaneously experiencing the particular and the universal is, of course, reserved exclusively to the French, given that all other peoples, in developing their sense of patriotism, undermine universalism rather than reinforcing it. They are aware of this, however, and–not being as dumb as all that–have secretly chosen France as their second fatherland, often preferring it to their native country. This allows Michelet to consider himself to be above any possible reproach of partiality: if he defends France, it is not because he is French but because he loves truth and good.

Michelet's reasoning contains an obvious paradox. The merit of France consists in having defended the principle of equality. However, if this principle is just, it forbids us to favor one people to the detriment of the others. The content of the statement is in contradiction with the very moral Michelet wishes to draw from its very existence, and this can only lead him onto shaky logical ground. "Every great people," he writes, "doubtless represents an idea important to humanity. But–great Heaven–how much truer this is of France!" When one considers that the "idea" under discussion is just that of equality, the precariousness of such a statement becomes clear. In actual fact, even were universal good and France's political program to coincide at a given point in history, this would not confer a lasting privilege on France, for it can (and, as we all know, does) change its politics at the drop of a hat.

Having thus disguised his nationalism as universalism, Michelet can give free sway to his impulse to denigrate other countries. The Russians, he writes, are "barbaric masses" given to–what else?–"fits of barbarism" and sounding like "a chorus of wild beasts" ; in brief, Russia is nothing but a "monster." Of the Germans, Michelet asks in *Le Peuple*: "As for German books, who reads them outside of Germany?" Following the Franco-Prussian War, this intellectual condescension continues–Michelet refers to the "vaporous ideas that fill a Northern brain between stove, pipe and beer mug"

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–but with a measure of hatred mixed in: "This absolute fidelity [characteristic of the Germans] is a virtue of barbarians"; "the race's dormant barbarism suddenly awoke"; in sum, "the time of the savage beast has come." Apparently, there is no significant difference between Germans and Russians.

The other nations scarcely fare any better. "We are not like the Italians, thank Heaven." England is a weak and bloated giant. The Jews, a people with no land, are a perpetual threat; they are bankers and usurers who sow terror wherever they go: "The Jews do have a fatherland–the London stock exchange; they are active everywhere, but their roots are in the land of gold." And if even France has suffered setbacks, this is because some of its ministers are foreigners.

Now, if ideology is conceded to play any role at all in political history, it must be acknowledged that thinkers like Michelet (who is but one of a long line of "republican nationalists" extending from Robespierre to Péguy) have a particularly heavy moral responsibility. Patriots who are nothing but patriots at least behave straightforwardly and do not raise false expectations: Charles Maurras, for instance, the theoretician of Action Francaise, never claimed that his nationalist combat was anything but antidemocratic and antirepublican. Michelet, while he is no less nationalistic than Maurras, advances beneath the mask of republican virtues and humanist principles, in a country where these values are held in high esteem. This accounts for his popularity–but also, perhaps, for my reticence towards him.

Last but not least, let us take up the case of Chateaubriand. He encountered the problem of "otherness" quite early in his life, having travelled to America as a young man. His original purpose was to observe Rousseau's "natural man" as embodied there by the American India.n He soon realized, however, that this plan could not be carried out, and his reading of Rousseau evolved from a superficial one (reduced to exotic primitivism) into a more accurate, humanistic one (though Chateaubriand presents this conclusion as a refinement of Christian ideals). He records the results of this evolution in his book *Les Natchez*, of which *Atala* and *René* are the best-known excerpts. One of his major characters, the Indian named Chactas, gradually discovers that the crucial opposition is not between "the others" and "ourselves," but between vice and virtue, both of which are present in every country in the world. His interlocutors in France, to whom Chateaubriand gives the names of La Bruyere and Fénelon, state that individuals must not be judged solely on the basis of the society to which they belong (be it "savage" or "civilized"); what unites human beings the world over is more important than what divides them. Yet this original equality does not lead to a relativistic renunciation of value judgements: precisely because the human species is one, it is possible to tell good from evil beyond the borders of one's

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native country

It should be added, however, that *Les Natchez* has another main character–René, the symmetrical opposite of Chactas. Both want to become acquainted with the other half of the world: whereas Chactas comes to France, René goes to America. Both are free of nationalistic prejudices that would incite them to prefer their country to others under all circumstances. However, there are important differences between them as well: whereas Chactas feels at home in both America and Europe, René is everywhere an alien; whereas Chactas attains a state of serenity and know how to help his fellowmen, René is incurably miserable and constantly brings misery to those near him. According to Chateaubriand, the reason for this is René's profound indifference towards society and others in general (itself the result of a disappointment in love); he lives "inside himself, withdrawn from the surrounding world." René is so obsessively egocentric that he transcends good and evil. Though Chateaubriand clearly projected himself into both Chactas and René, expressing his philosophy through the former and his experience through the latter, *Les Natchez* is a book written far more by René than by Chactas, both as regards its style and composition as well as its general meaning. Thus, the universalism professed by Chactas-Chateaubriand is as often as not belied by the self-centeredness of René-Chateaubriand.

A few years later, the author set off on another voyage–this time to the Orient: Greece, Palestine, and Egypt. This time, however, the conflict had disappeared, and René was sole master on board. Chateaubriand henceforth writes using the first person: "I am interested in nothing that interests others. . . .Everything tires me: I am painfully aware of how boring my days are, and everywhere I go I yawn my life away." His travelogue is, therefore, unlike that of earlier travellers: in this book, as he warns us from the start, "I speak eternally of myself." The outside world now interests Chateaubriand only as a reservoir of potential images for his next book, or as an opportunity to collect stories of which he is the main character; it is a world of objects in which he himself is the only subject. This explains his total lack of interest in human encounters: he says that when, by chance, someone asks to speak to him, he takes flight: "Being somewhat unsociable by nature, I had not come to the Orient in search of what is called society: I was impatient to see camels, and to hear their driver's cry." This preference for camels over natives will be recognized as a distinguishing characteristic of the modern tourist.

If it is absolutely necessary to have dealings with other human beings, let them at least be dead ones. The past is infinitely more attractive than the present: it never yells at you as do these insolent Turks and Arabs. "Before we may speak of Carthage, which is the only object of interest here, we

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must rid ourselves of Tunis." Chateaubriand experiences his most acute disappointment on the site of ancient Sparta, where he finds nothing but modern buildings: "Not even one poor little ancient ruin with which to console oneself." Depressed by the ascendancy of the present over the past, he flees: "I quickly descended from the castle, despite the cries of the guides who wished to show me modern ruins and tell me tales of agas, pashas, cadis, and vayvodes." Modern ruins–how dare they put such vulgarity on display? And of what interest are living Turks compared with dead Greeks?

Chateaubriand's itinerary (the ideological rather than the geographic one) can serve to illustrate the ambiguity of the terms "individual" and "individualism." Chateubriand's universalism, such as it is expounded by "Fénelon" or Chactas, does imply a recognition of the individual as distinct from the group to which he belongs: we should value neither the Indians nor the French but virtue, which can be found in all climates and is accessible to every individual, be it through rejecting the customs of his country. In this sense, individualism is the cornerstone of humanism, and Chateaubriand is a faithful disciple of Rousseau. René, however, is individualistic in a different sense of the term (a sense for which, in fact, the way was paved by other writings by Rousseau, the autobiographical ones)–he is interested only in himself, for, in the last analysis, he is the only subject that counts. Thus, as individualism degenerates into self-centeredness, the subject takes another step on the path towards autonomy: he is not only a necessary but a self-sufficient entity; others are not only different from me, they are superfluous. "A man need not travel for enrichment; he carries the universe within himself," declares Chateaubriand in the conclusion to his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*.

Chateaubriand started out with a humanism he perceived as being Christian rather than "philosophical" (but in this respect the tenets of the Enlightenment were in keeping with the Christian spirit). He ended with an attitude in which ignorance of others vied for first place with an a priori contempt of them–and this rejection of others turned out to be well-adapted to the imperial policies implemented at that time. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Chateaubriand followed a pattern we now recognize as familiar: adopting a few principles from the preceding century, he perverted them by applying them in the service of goals to which they were rigorously opposed. Thus, to the first forms of this perversion–nationalism and scientism–we may now add egocentrism.

Let us now return to the questions we formulated at the start, and see whether we are better able to answer them after this brief excursion into history. The first observation that can be made is that scientism, nationalism and egocentrism are not the mere result of a Romantic negation of Enlightenment and Revolutionary values. There is no doubt but that, in certain re-

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spects, Romanticism was opposed to Enlightenment rationalism and universalism; however, as far as the subject at hand is concerned, there is no clear break between the "Romanticism" of Chateaubriand, Michelet, and Renan, and their point of departure in individualist philosophy as it was broadly sketched in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Secondly, to claim that scientism, nationalism, and egocentrism derive directly and logically from Enlightenment philosophy itself is inaccurate. Rather, the conclusion I come to is that, while not wholly foreign to the spirit of the Enlightenment, they represent a deflection of that spirit. The villain of the story is neither an invading outsider nor the hitherto hero–but rather the associates, confederates, and companions of the hero. Long thought to be indispensable, they are actually anything but that: in fact, they threaten to destroy everything their ostensible master has created.

Two facts in particular lead me to this conclusion. The first is the logical incompatibility between humanistic theory and scientific, nationalistic, or egocentric practice. Scientism (as expounded by Saint-Simon, Comte, or Renan) claims to be rational, but it winds up treating science as a religion, thus undermining its very essence. As for Michelet or Péguy, they are obliged to resort to highly specious arguments in order to reconcile humanism with patriotism. Chateaubriand, in turn, must deal with the contradiction of trying to affirm simultaneously that he loves the human species and takes interest only in himself.

The second reason for which I do not see humanism as leading inevitably to scientism, nationalism, and egocentrism is that one can analyze the latter perversions using concepts and principles derived from humanism itself. It was Rousseau who stated that ethics should not be subordinated to science, that cosmopolitanism and patriotism were incompatible (and the former ethically superior to the latter), and that it was impossible to imagine an individual apart from society. It was Montesquieu who declared moderation to be a universal principle of political life, independent of the objective conditions peculiar to each country, who pointed out that valuing one's particular culture ("l'esprit de la nation") did not necessarily imply blind patriotism, and who revealed the crucial role played in individuals' lives by their social appurtenance. The ideals formulated by Montesquieu and Rousseau enable us both to comprehend and judge the "deflections" of Enlightenment philosophy perpetrated by the nineteenth century. These deflections, far from being the logical outcome of humanism, represent its destruction.

It is true that, historically speaking, they began to emerge at the same time as the Enlightenment itself: scientism first made its appearance as the materialism of Helvétius and Diderot, or the utopianism of Condorcet; as for

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nationalism and egocentrism, they are present in some statements of Rousseau himself, taken in isolation from their context and from Rousseau's thought as a whole. This explains the erroneous interpretations of some historians, who took certain arguments at their face value instead of recognizing them for the subtle disguises or naive illusions they were–and went on to blame humanism for crimes committed in the name of what were actually its perversions. For the same reason, the latter seem to me to place democratic principles in greater jeopardy than do remnants of *ancien régime* ideology, that is, anachronistic nostalgia for absolute monarchy.

Comparing the humanism of Montesquieu and Rousseau with nineteenth-century scientism, nationalism and egocentrism allows us to make a further observation. Each of the latter three doctrines restricts itself to a single aspect of life and eliminates or neglects all the others. For scientists, the only thing that counts is universality (the common appurtenance of all human beings to the same species); this fundamental identity implies that the same laws should be imposed the world over, to the end of creating a single universal state. Differences among cultures (or nations, in this sense of the word), are held for naught–it will suffice, said Auguste Comte, to pin a national ribbon onto the universal flag. Variations among individuals are similarly undeserving of notice. Conversely, nationalists like Michelet reject both universal references and the aspirations of individuals to autonomy. As for egocentrists like René and his countless descendants, they are concerned exclusively with themselves, and remain as oblivious to the universal perspective as to that of national cultures. Each of these attitudes leads to disastrous results.

The lesson one can draw from Montesquieu and Rousseau is that all three of these aspects of existence–all three levels of organization of human life–are necessary, and that it is dangerous to favor one to the detriment of the others. Montesquieu was capable of acknowledging the individual's right to autonomy, personal security, and private freedom; for all that, he did not deny the importance of cultural appurtenance (*l'esprit des nations*). Moreover, though his contemporaries may not always have been aware of it, he also preserved a universal reference–without which, indeed, one could make no value judgment at all: tyranny is despicable under every sky, and the interest of humanity must be considered over that of one's native land. The same is true of Rousseau, who described the different types of interaction among individuals as follows: "Now that we have dealt with man's physical relationship to other living beings and his moral relationship to other men, it remains for us to consider his civic relationship to his fellow citizens." The personal, sociocultural and moral dimensions of existence must neither be eliminated nor substituted for one another: human beings are

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polyvalent; to unify them is to mutilate them.

However, it is not enough to oppose authentic humanism to its corrupted forms and declare the former superior to the latter–we must also determine the reasons for which the latter arose. Things seem relatively clear in the case of egocentrism; it is the hypertrophy of the notion of individual autonomy. The egocentrist carries to an extreme the first steps in this direction taken by humanist philosophy itself; and, not content with recognizing the individual as a necessary entity, declares him to be a totally self-sufficient one. The cases of nationalism and scientism–or their close relatives, racialism and exoticism–are less straightforward. The popularity of these doctrines is due to the fact that they embody values that find no other means of expression and are felt to be lacking in the modern world. Briefly recalled: scientism treats science as a religion; nationalism emphasizes membership in a sociocultural group; racialism states that human beings are of necessity hierarchized; primitivist exoticism, again, deems the community superior to the sum of its individuals and favors interpersonal relations over those between people and things.

An examination of this list of values implied or affirmed by the perversions of humanism enables us to draw two conclusions. The first is that all of them derive from holistic ideology (if I may use this term to refer to the governing principle of traditional communities, wherein the whole is seen as more important than its component parts). Holistic societies (of which France's *ancien régime* is an example) respect religious consensus, a hierarchy of persons and positions, the group more than the individual, and social rather than economic relations. Apparently, the emergence of modern democracy–made possible by the victory of individualistic ideology over its predecessor–entailed the repression of holistic values. The latter, however, did not simply vanish: they reappeared in those more or less monstrous forms known as nationalism, racism, and totalitarian utopias.

The second conclusion follows logically from the first: both holistic and individualistic ideology are, in some ways, incomplete representations of reality. They declare certain characteristics of human life to be preeminent and others subordinate. This also means that it is a mistake to see all the good on one side and all the evil on the other. Our present attachment to values derived from individualism (our humanism) cannot be abandoned, but it would be in our own interest, as Louis Dumont has written, to moderate these attitudes with principles and values gleaned elsewhere. This is possible as long as there is no fundamental incompatibility among the former and the latter (in which the the result would be pure eclecticism), but rather a reshifting of dominant and subordinate elements. Indeed, this is the only hope we have of mastering the forces behind holistic values: if we do not seek to

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tame them, we run the risk of seeing them reappear under the grotesque but threatening guise of racism or totalitarianism.

Thus, new forms of expression for the repressed holistic values must be found. Scientism could prosper only because it filled the void left by religion as a guide to behavior. This void must indeed be filled, but not by the idolatry of science; the ethical principles on which democratic consensus is based should be used to control both the applications of science and the excesses of ideology. Racialism codifies the existence of hierarchies among individuals–it is pointless to deny the differences on which these hierarchies are based and the need they fulfill, but we must avoid naive biologism and openly acknowledge our own hierarchies, which are spiritual rather than physical. Nothing compels us to embrace the relativistic idea that "it's the same difference." Nationalism promotes membership in a group: it would be dangerous to believe that such membership is useless or negligible (although being uprooted from a group may have its own advantages); what can be affirmed, however, is that a strong sense of cultural appurtenance is not the same thing as civic patriotism, and that a given individual belongs to any number of groups, which vary both in size and in nature: family, neighborhood, city, region, country, and continent on the one hand; profession, age, sex, and social milieu on the other.

In other words, it is not only possible but necessary to criticize modern ideology by means of an ideal which is not foreign to it and does not imply rejecting it out of hand. In order to denounce scientism, nationalism, and egocentrism, we are not obliged to renounce the principles that make up the humanist ideal and are inherent in the idea of democracy. Our present governments are far from being a perfect embodiment of the latter–too often, they have allowed themselves to be guided by principles profoundly incompatible with it. If only for this reason, the humanist ideal still has a very promising future ahead of it.

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FICTION

Alan Lelchuk

ADVENTURES OF A FICTION BOY

Let's start down there, underground, in the basement. Where else should a true Brooklyn boy, you know, a boy from the 1950s, hungry, raw, maybe primitive too, begin his full education? In the basement. But uptown, in a Manhattan basement, and surrounded by books. Immersed in books the way a farmboy is dipped in nature, each with his chores as well as passion. In my case, thousands of books set on rickety shelves and in wavering piles, and thousands more awaiting sorting out in unopened cartons. And all of them, secondhand and fiction. Hordes of fiction titles, awaiting sorting, cleaning, classifying, shelving. Detective fiction. Science fiction. Fiction for juveniles. (Children's books, along with gothic romances, go upstairs, while Westerns pass on to the Americana room.) But mainly, adult fiction. Everything from D'Annunzio to Dostoevsky, Maurice Hewlett to Hardy, Fast to Feuchtwanger, Conan Doyle to Zane Grey. And thousands of others that neither you nor I had ever heard of. A junkyard for battered, obscure novels. A poorman's graveyard or reservoir of lost souls, discovered delights. Underground, in a used book store.

And yours truly, Aaron Schlossberg, was the guardian, the gatekeeper, the official fiction boy. At sixteen, he was given the awesome responsibility of bringing order and clarity to the spilling incoherence, of keeping up-to-date on all the ancient fiction down there, some forty thousand titles musty with time and disuse. A vast army of writers to alphabetize, classify, sort out, discover, and remember; above all, remember where I've placed them. Otherwise they're doomed to oblivion. That was my challenge.

"Yeah, don't worry, it sounds like a lot at first," advised portly George with the unpronounceable Polish name, "You'll get the hang of it, and after a while you'll remember the titles easily enough. They just sort of stay with you." Now in his early fifties, George had come to Schulte's as a boy of fifteen, to help out his sister in bookkeeping, and he had stayed on forty years. A pink-faced bachelor who reddened at any offbeat remark about the oppo-

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Editor's Note: "Adventures of a Fiction Boy" is adapted from the novel, *Brooklyn Boy*, to be published in November 1989 by McGraw Hill Book Co. Copyright © 1989 by Alan Lelchuk.

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site sex, George was one of the most human fixtures of the store, a kind of innocent Falstaff. There was also Roland the bookkeeper and religious-booksman, up on the second tier; Mosey, or Moses the packager, who wrapped books for postal delivery in his corner of the basement; Bernie the cynical assistant manager and night college student; and Lewis, ("not Lew," I was told) the manager and owner, and son of the original founder of Schulte's. All of them, and their eccentric predispositions, were indeed fixtures of the place as much as any of the dusty old volumes themselves.

I came to work there when I was a senior in high school, taking the IRT subway uptown after school in the depths of Brooklyn, and arriving about an hour later at 14th Street in Manhattan. Climbing upstairs, I'd pass the bustling world of dresses and coats "On Sale" always at Klein's Department store, and then, walking a half-dozen blocks, descend to the seedy planet of used fiction. I arrived about 1:30 or so, and stayed till closing time, at six. I knew little about books, you understand. I was a reality-boy, much more interested in the adventures of the streets, the schoolyards, the clubrooms, than in those of the printed page. So to enter the domain of the dusty, the vast underground of used books, was something new and strange to me. All I knew was that it was private down there, and all mine; well, almost all mine.

There were the clients of course, who periodically trickled down the wooden stairs and wandered in the dark, airless basement. (The two distant windows were hardly ever opened, for some reason.) Then, in one far corner, Mosey, the light-skinned Negro with the pomaded hair and pencil mustache, wrapped and weighed the books on his wooden table, before taking them to the post office at the end of each day. He and I struck it up okay, right off, and I'd visit with him maybe once a day and shoot the breeze. Also, once a week, there occurred the friendly card game, with Mosey, Roland, and Bernie playing, during some very quiet hours. Usually George and I looked on, as observers, and I also played chickee, or lookout, for Lewis, just in case he should saunter on down, or need anything. Though he rarely ever wandered down into our nether region.

I made about twenty or twenty-five dollars normally, and often another five for extra hours; this enabled me to save quite a lot. For, after giving my mother one-third for the house, spending another third on trainfare and food, I saved nearly ten bucks a week. This added up, you know. And one day, heading down Broadway towards Tenth Street, I passed an office machines and furniture shop having a sale, and my eye was caught by a portable Royal typewriter in one corner, priced specially at $69.95. My gut reacted, and I knew suddenly what I was going to save for: my first typewriter! Inside the store, the salesman said I shouldn't worry, he wouldn't run

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out of those. When I told him that I worked on Fourth Avenue, over at Schulte's, he smiled warmly, said he knew Mosey, and using a small pencil on a pad, said he'd let me have the machine for $62.50. On the spot I gave him a five dollar deposit to hold it, thanked him, and walked off, almost flying from my high, not the autumn wind. Just the sight and thought of the sleek gray machine excited me the way cars had revved up my friends' hearts. I had always written out in longhand my pieces for the high school newspaper, and then had to type them over in school; this way I could type it straight on the machine. Especially since typing had been the best class I had had at junior high. A typewriter. No one in my family had ever owned one, you see, and here I was, going to earn one for myself.

(. . . .)

After a few months, in November or so, I began to settle in, getting the hang of the place, the feel for the different rooms and slower or grubbier way of life down below. Of the rooms, there was the Special Collections: leatherbound sets housed in a small raggedy place, an odd hole for Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope in soft Moroccan leather, say. The Americana room was more noble, a long rectangular area with larger shelving, to accommodate geography, photography, history, regionalism books, with an entrance consisting of two narrow swinging wood-and-glass doors like an old Western saloon. (This was Bernie's domain, and he attended to it once or twice weekly.) Next, a Detective Fiction room, whose afficionados, respectably dressed, seemed to resemble their favorite shadowy characters, giving me furtive glances if I tried to help them, and bearing away their books in mysterious paper bags. Of course the main room, complemented by many divergent aisles and alcoves, was devoted to adult fiction; this area was a very large square room so crammed with endless green metal shelves that the space seemed smaller, more suffocating. Chiefly, I became familiar with the thousands of books there: the rows and rows of semi-battered spines and dusty covers that faced me wherever I turned, and threatened to eat up all the space. Gradually, however, I felt those books not merely as inanimate objects, but as comrades of sorts, all of us hunkered down below in that boiler room of the Strange Ship Schulte's. In fact I grew so cozy below, with my pals and me, that I came to resent going up, on deck, to help out, if Lewis or George signalled for me.

Mostly however I didn't need to. For on the whole I was left by myself, below, to bring some order to L's and H's say, to continue to unpack the year- or two-year-old unopened cartons, and to increase my knowledge of which books we had in stock. Periodically, during the day, I'd be interrupted by Lewis buzzing me from upstairs and who, when I went to the bottom of the special, unused stairway, would call down to me, "Aaron, do we happen

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to have a copy of *The Winthrop Women* by Seton?" or "*Double Double* by Feuchtwanger?" or "*Children of Abraham* by Asch?" or "*The Late George Apley* by Marquand?" And do you know what? It got so, even in the space of those three months, that I'd know immediately, in many cases, whether we had the novel or not, and where in fact I could lay my hands on it. If we had it, I'd dust it off, and run it upstairs to the waiting Lewis, standing with his customer.

Like the fixtures, the employees, and the used books, there were also the clients who regularly haunted my fiction shelves in those early months. They too, looked used, worn, sometimes broken, always devoted. Some were New Yorkers, some out-of-towners who never failed to make a book-stop, if they came to the city, and buy up a batch of fiction for the next several months' reading. The tall lady with the feathered hats and darting glances was always on the lookout for a new Harvey Allen or Vicki Baum. The charming couple from the Village, a short stout silent man and his talkative thin wife, who hunted down the detectives with grim looks and bulldog waggles, filling their brown shopping bags. A fancy East Sider–until Schulte's, I didn't know of the sharp differences between the two sides, East and West–wore the first ascot I had ever seen inside his tweed jacket, and always seemed to ask for books I never had, then, nodding with superiority, found two or three others to take as compensation. Interestingly enough, only after two or three months of seeing me there regularly did these odd souls begin to admit me into their presence, acknowledging tacitly my right to tenant their basement.

One gentleman in particular began to stand out, in part because our earliest meeting turned into a minor confrontation, in which he muttered something like, "Why the hell don't they get a boy who knows real books for a change!" after he asked me for a copy of *The Possessed* and I asked him, "Who wrote it?"

It took him a few visits before he saw that I was actually a quick learner and eager to do my job well. A bulky man who wore a gray fedora and sports jacket, sometimes a tie, he spoke in a brusque voice, but was slightly taken aback when I told him on his next visit I had learned the Dostoevsky titles.

"Hmm," he muttered when I rattled them all off, "have you read any?"

I shook my head.

"What do you read?"

I didn't want to mention the Classic Comics, or the aviator hero books, and said, "Oh, adventure stuff, I guess."

"Aren't you in high school? What do you read there?"

When I explained that in Jefferson High, I read books and plays like

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Arrowsmith, Adam Bede, R.U.R., he shook his head.

"Dismal. No wonder you kids grow up illiterate. With little interest in reading. What do you want to be, do you have any idea?"

I didn't dare mention writing at that point, so I cited my other chief pursuit. "An explorer."

He narrowed his gray eyes, revealing his high pallid forehead and giving me a kind of inquisitor's look. He reflected, and took out a small notebook.

"Here, see if you can get hold of a life of Rimbaud. It might interest you. And I'm also writing down a novel, for you, if you feel like reading it." He nodded with authority, and left.

After he departed, George approached me, and asked if I knew who the fellow was.

"What do you mean?"

He laughed. "He's a famous literary critic. Barrett is his name. He must like you, he hardly ever talks to anyone here. Just picks up his books and leaves."

I explained how he was just chastising me for my ignorance. "Barrett, huh? What's he written?"

George gave me a few of his titles, and I managed to find one in stock: *Kipling's Legacy.* It looked simple enough to read, but I had no idea of all the books he was talking about inside. Charles Edmund Barrett. I liked that name, so formal, so long. Anyway, I began to hunt around for one of the Rimbaud titles he had recommended. Instead I found first the novel he had suggested, *Look Homeward, Angel* by Wolfe. And immediately, that afternoon, sitting on my cushioned bench in a remote corner, away from the stairway or door, I began reading that weighty tome, beneath the bare seventy-five watt lightbulb.

To my surprise, I was immediately taken by the character Eugene Gant, and captivated by the whipping, headlong prose of the author. I read almost forty pages in that first sitting, interrupted three times by buzzer calls, and managed to take the book home with me, sticking with it on the subway. Jostled this way and that on my torn cane seat, I couldn't stop reading it, despite the tightly-packed pages and poor light. And for the next week or so, I was hooked that way, poring through the book everywhere, at work, on the subway, at home, Even at school, in English class, while they discussed *Ivanhoe*, I followed Gant.

And when I finished it, I felt heady with excitement, and searched in earnest for that life of Rimbaud, as well as being on the lookout for another novel of that Wolfe.

Just around that time, while my informal reading education had begun,

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something else occurred of interest, also down below.

I was in the midst of emptying yet another carton of long-dead books when Bernie appeared, cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and said he wanted to show me something "special" in Americana. Sure, I said, wiping my hands of the endless dust and happy for the invitation to his private inner sanctum, my first.

"You're about to see the *real* powers of Americana," he advised, as we made our way through the swinging saloon doors. Immediately he put his finger to his lips, silencing me, and then, pointed me to a ladder leaning up against a high shelf. What the hell was he talking about?

At his prompting, I climbed up four or five rungs, and there, on the shelf marked Southwest, I found a space cleared between the books. A faint buzzing sound arose, alongside *Arizona: Land of Plenty.* Looking closer, I saw a round peephole facing me, maybe the size of a large knothole in the wood; at his gesturing, I leaned closer and peered through. At first my eyes couldn't fathom what was going on, except for a flickering darkness; but presently I realized that I was in a home-movie of sorts, maybe an eight-millimeter showing on the wall. And there, the picture expanding with my familiarity, I perceived a busty woman entering the apartment of two well-dressed men, smiling and sitting down, allowing her skirt to hike high above her knees. Soon she was having her drink, laughing with white teeth protruding, and leaning far over for a cigarette, her full breasts almost spilling out entirely of her blouse. My throat grew dry, my chest expanded with my breathing, and I threw Bernie a quick glance just to show him I was in full control. He stared at me with a cheap grin. Returning to the peephole, I now also realized something else; inside the room on the other side of the wall a man was whispering to a woman, they were drinking, and there was a brushing movement. Cheesus! I almost fell over. Meanwhile on the screen the woman was already loosening her skirt and blouse, with the two men following suit, undressing.

Bernie was tugging at me. "Hey, better get going–old Lewis is buzzing for you, and I already gave him the bathroom excuse a few minutes ago."

(. . . .)

Later on, in the next few weeks of winter, I began to learn a little more about the entire basement, and what went on in the far side of Americana. It seemed that Jackson, the large black man who operated the elevator for the rest of the building, ran a kind of after-hours gambling and whorehouse in his rooms downstairs. The gambling took place chiefly on Friday, payday, about six o'clock, when there was a regular card game, liquor, and several women hanging out. From outside, you could enter into Jackson's side of the basement via his freight elevator, which would descend to the base-

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ment and slide open its huge doors on both sides, like a cattle car on a train. The floor of the elevator served as a bridge between places, Jackson's Hole, as Mosey termed it, and Schulte's fiction basement.

Jackson himself was a congenial fellow, with a big warm smile and Victorian handlebar mustache. After Bernie had introduced us one day, Jackson invited me to come over any time I wished.

"Just remember you're eighteen," he grinned broadly, "in case anyone ever should enquire."

It was Mosey who immediately warned me against going over there. "Sheet," he said, shaking his dusky head over coffee when I told him of Jackson's invitation, "that man'd hustle his mother for a silver dollar. You stay away from that joint, if you know what's good for you. He's jes lucky I don't blow the whistle on him and his doings."

I listened to Mosey, and trusted him, but the thought of that den of sin just a few steps away from my house of fiction seemed to put the right finishing touch on life in the basement. I mean, I was learning all about the full powers and peculiar charms of life uptown, even though a brothel alongside a bookstore was a little more than my imagination had allowed for. No wonder I felt that real life was to be found downstairs, while simple, shallow commerce was above, and I resented being called upstairs to help out. My place was in the basement, my niche amidst the used novels, and if the lure of illicitness sirened my way on occasion, via that secret peephole, I felt in a way that I was only extending my education.

Immersed in fiction, lured by pornography, semi-tutored in literature, I felt excited and raw, a kind of rookie in Americana. Back in Jefferson High, I was involved in the basketball season and adventures with pals, but all that seemed high schoolish stuff next to the challenges uptown. I'd sense this, as I bumped and rattled my way up to Manhattan on the New Lots Avenue El, which went underground at Utica Avenue, while I journeyed with Eugene Gant or the new fellow I had discovered in the basement, a Chicago kid named Augie March. (I finally had gotten hold of a life of Rimbaud, a small New Directions volume.) Once a week or so also, I walked from Fourteenth Street via Broadway in order to get a peek at my royal Royal, just checking to make sure it was still there, waiting. All was in order. And as soon as I entered Schulte's, and went downstairs, and changed into my drab uniform of worn flannel shirt and old dungarees, and settled in amidst the used tomes, motes of dust and broken spines, I felt at home, secure. Private again. Firmly ensconced as fiction boy.

Maybe part of the reason too why I felt so secure and firm down there was the confusion taking place in my real home, our Brooklyn apartment. Things had grown somewhat hectic there, with Sam the new man and lover,

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trying his best to be kindly and decent to me, but rubbing me the wrong way invariably and inevitably. Small disputes blew up into large battles. If he wanted to watch some inconsequential television show, when I perhaps wanted to tune in to some other silly program, I took it badly and fought him over it. If he mentioned, with good humor, how much he was helping out the household with food and money, I'd leap up and tell him what he could do with it! (Of course the fact that the house needed his help only hurt worse.) The unusual arrangement, whereby Sam stayed over at our place for four nights and at his own for three, with his estranged wife and beloved daughter, was probably also affecting me in school, where my usual mischief-making was becoming something larger. Until, that is, Schulte's entered the picture, and somehow calmed me down in school.

It was not surprising that I spent many hours downstairs idling away the time, daydreaming, projecting, and rearranging reality.

(. . . .)

That far side of Americana was a darker, stranger world from ours; luridly lit (including a string of neon lights blinking), cozy and tawdry (old stuffed couch and chairs) a brothel not a bookstore. One large square room, off of which a corridor led to several other smaller rooms. A round wooden table with straightbacked chairs occupied the center, and, on the walls peering down at you, colorful calendars of brown and white females, nude or nearly nude. The music came from a pair of large wooden speakers, soft rock-and-roll like dirty clouds circling and hovering, looking for a way out. Only there was no exit, it seemed.

"Hey, come on in and meet the folks," Jackson exclaimed, guiding the dazed me.

Four people were lounging about and sitting, including Jackson. A male friend, and two females. The older one, maybe thirty, was a shiny ebony lady enclosed in a tight yellow dress, which barely held in her plump curves; she wore black pumps and big golden hoop earrings. The other was a younger white woman, maybe eighteen or twenty, dressed simply in pale blue sweater and flare skirt, and flat shoes. Slender, strawberry in complexion and hair, she seemed out of place there, like me say. They made a very unlikely pair, I thought, and wondered if all this was somewhat fictional, too.

The male dude asked, "What's your choice, sport?" Not unfriendly, but, well, chintzy, his smile forced. He was dressed to kill, I noticed; Panama hat, satiny vest, and black and white spats. The first real pair I had ever seen.

"Uh," I looked over at his makeshift bar, "The 7-Up will be fine."

"Mixed with Seagram's, right?"

"No, by itself actually. Thanks."

"The boy don't drink?" said the man, mocking lightly.

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"Give him what he wants, Cecil."

My hands fidgeted in my pockets, and I replied, "Sometimes I do." Foolish lie, which made me even more nervous.

"Here," Jackson said, handing me my soft fizzing drink, "take it easy a while 'fore we get things going. This heah is Gennifer, with a 'G," he smiled, indicating the younger woman, who smiled shyly from the couch. "And the tiger is called Callie. You watch out for her now, she"ll be putting hair on your chest fore you realize it!"

I wasn't sure entirely of the meaning of that phrase, though I sensed the spirit.

Callie waved her hand at Jackson and his humor, and reached out for my hand.

Limply, I accepted her grasp.

"Don't you pay no attention to the man's jive. Nice to meet you. What's your name, son?"

"Aaron."

She broke into a smile. "Like Aaron, making that golden calf, huh? Come on over heah and join us, why doncha?" And she led me to the brocade-covered couch, drink in hand. "That way we don't have to listen to the bull that man throws." A good friendly smile, too, filled with flashy gold fillings.

Tucking my wallet deeper into the back pocket of my dungarees, I took the half-dozen steps, and joined the two women on the worn, comfortable sofa. I sunk in, and down, deeply. Chuck Berry was now singing about the faithlessness of his Maybelline.

Callie moved a bowl of pretzels and nuts closer on the coffee table, and I took a few. I tried to refocus on my duty and purpose here, as she drawled in a Southern accent, "Aint seen you heah before. First time?" I nodded, and breathed in the pungent perfume.

"Oh it ain't too bad. Even Jackson's all right, once you get past his hooey! Right Gen?" "Yeah," the girl on my left agreed, gazing at me with quick green-gray eyes. Patches of freckles on both cheeks added to her adolescent, poignant look.

"Where are you from?" I asked

"Buffalo. Do you know it?"

"No."

That shy smile. "Not much to know." She lifted a drink, which looked like Coca-cola with ice-cubes, and I wondered if she was old enough. I noticed now the crucifix around her neck.

Jackson looming nearby, offered, "How bout a little movie folks until our two other hands arrive?"

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Callie, sipping her amber-colored drink, smiled warmly at me. I shrugged, not fully understanding the meaning. (*He, Aaron, was beginning to understand, though, that the ground rules here were hotly different from those in Schulte's, or from those he had lived by, like labor, merit, purposefulness, reward.)*

The room darkened even more, my throat went dry and my stomach tingled some. As I found myself drinking all the 7-Up, I wondered if a real drink would settle me down somewhat.

The wall became the same flickering screen as I had viewed from the knotty peephole. The reel began, flashing the countdown numbers in reverse, while Callie, casually it seemed, laid her hand on my leg.

In another minute, as the first figures appeared on the screen, Jackson came by offering "fill-ups" to everyone. To his surprise, and mine, I asked now for a touch of Seagram's in my 7-Up.

"Watch him ladies," he cautioned, handing me the drink, "he may be getting bad now."

"How old are you?" murmured Gennifer.

"Eighteen," I pronounced emphatically.

The pornographic film progressed, a man visiting a female doctor and her nurse assistant, and I sipped my drink, trying to keep my temperature down, my thinking steady, my lines of reality clear. At least that's how I reasoned to myself, as the dark mysterious hand roamed my leg, gently squeezing here and there. The eight-millimeter wheezed on, the nurse and doctor began to undress and examine the male patient, and I found it hard to believe that I was but six feet away from Americana, six feet away from my regular station of duty and respectability. For here it was worlds away, like being in a different latitude. I was thoroughly dazed by the strong aromas of smoke and perfume, teased by Callie's hand murmurings. Did you have to go to Aden in Africa or Harar in Absynnia like Rimbaud to feel zones apart, strange, on your own, in foreign territory?

For comfort I think, I glanced at Gen, who gave me that same half-smile of shy appeal, and so I patted her knee, for her comfort. *(You see, he was beginning to act like someone else, a fictional shadow self?)* To my surprise, she clasped down on my hand with firmness, edging my thumb up her thigh. Oh, I was getting hooked good and deep now, doubly hooked say, and it was confusing, teeming, scary-pleasing.

The movie reeled on, the screen actor and actresses played their porno parts, and soon, the real boy and two women played theirs. First the boy noted that his drink was half-empty, and that the room itself had taken on a gauzy impression, like strips of sticky paper laid over everything. Oh he sensed what was happening all right, sensed for example that he was slipping

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into another element totally, more liquid than solid, as he heard the tinkle of glasses and warm laughter and rolling film. Dusty Schulte's seemed a long way off. And resisting not at all, he fully accepted being led down the narrow dark corridor by the pair of mermaids, one bulging yellow in front, the other slender, brushing his backside. In the new room sat a potted fern, a blowup color photo of a South Sea island, a dim lamplight by a seedy double bed. Augie, Eugene, Rimbaud, Aaron? The low voices of cajoling and easy seducing, the slow unraveling of clothing and sudden revelation of bodies–all this hit him like being underwater and seeing everything through the medium of translucent blue (here red). And he was swiftly transformed into a fish of a boy, pulled this way and expanded that way in exercises of the flesh. Callie and Buffalo (her name vanishing) played in tandem, baiting him with honeyed limbs and hooking him with surprise openings, and at sixteen Aaron was dropped down sweet chutes of pleasure that shocked him, scooping his breath away. Though he had been with girls before, this scene was greedier, lustier, fuller pleasure. If you'd have asked him, and he were alert enough to answer, he couldn't have sworn that what was happening was real, and not part of the reel he had been viewing, so much was his imagination filled to the brim, and beyond, with body play.

Soon, he was welcomed back into the card room with good-natured laughter and joking congratulations, by the old and new pair of card players.

"I can see the new hair already!" shrieked Jackson.

"Why pick on a mere boy that way!" noted a white, paunchy newcomer, puffing on a cigar.

I was alert enough to ask for a cup of coffee, before sitting down to play. I drank it straight too, hating the bitterness, trying to collect my clarity. The two gamblers joined us at the table, the black fellow adjusting a green visor on his forehead, and the white fellow revealing a fat roll of dollars.

"Dealer's choice, gentlemen?" Jackson asked, shuffling the deck, and dealing five hands.

Sure enough, beginner's luck. With the women flanking me, for good fortune (I supposed), I did pretty well. We alternated between five card poker and seven card stud, for quarters and halves, with a final card ceiling of three dollars. Pretty stiff tariff, I knew. Almost immediately, I caught a run of cards, a good long run for a whole hour or so–you know, a third three to beat two high pairs; a fifth diamond for a flush; a king-high full house in stud to beat a smaller house. Even drew an eight for an inside straight in five card. The works. Change the deck? Why in the world would I want to do that? I was raking in the dollars so much that I even handed each of my female good luck charms an extra fiver, on top of the earlier "tip" I had given them, like a regular gambler. At one point I counted something like eighty-six

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bucks–enough not only to help out Mosey, who had lost his last week's salary in his card game, and give my mother, but also, enough with my savings to buy right off the Royal typewriter. Why not shoot for the whole thing, I thought, while running so hot? Laughter at the jokes, going so well, I even drank a bit more, and played on, and on.

Well, you know the rest. How I blew the winnings, blew Mosey's paycheck, blew my mother's share, blew my initial twenty bucks as well. The cards simply turned against me and nothing I could do was good enough. While the Spinners sang, I lost my charmed life. If I played it conservative, I lost; when I played aggressive, I lost; when I tried to bluff, I was called and defeated; when I didn't call a bluff, I played the sucker. As it slipped away, and my spirit sank, the women stayed right with me, though, Callie whispering I'd come back and Buffalo patting my knee. Inside I was sweating it out, however, knowing I was falling and unable to stop it, looking up at the wall calendars and seeing them smiling, and burning from the rich abundance of a half hour ago, now gone.

Until Jackson shocked me by saying, "Wanna borrow a ten or twenty, Aaron? Looks like you need some now to ante up right here, buddy."

Well, when I realized he was right, my bundles gone and my big bills gone too from my pockets, I had to restrain my anguish, and tried my best for a manly sort of look. "Nah," I answered him, "I should have just quit when I was ahead, I guess." Callie tried to console me by offering me "to forget things for a while," in the back room with her, but I declined. There was to be no consolation.

Saying, "I guess I better get going after all," I stood up, and probably wobbled a bit, for Jackson was at my side, steadying me.

He inquired, "You okay now? Why doncha rest a while before taking off huh?"

"Nah, I'm okay." But when I checked my pockets for my keys, I discovered that I had no real money left, not even lunch money for the next week! My eyes grew bleary, and I cursed myself privately: You stupid prick, you schmuck with earflaps.

Aside to Jackson I asked if he could loan me five till next week.

"Hey man, I wouldn't let you leave stone-broke. Here's ten, man, how's that?"

I thanked him, said goodbye to the women who pecked me on the cheek (Callie calling, "See you next Friday huh Aaron?"), and made the return journey through the elevator to the other, more familiar side of the basement. My stomach churned, my head swirled, and a spiral of desolation swept up through me.

I think the next few hours (and next few days) were the low points of

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my youth. How could I have been so stupid? So totally stupid? As I went about closing up the place, securing the downstairs doors and windows, and turning off the lights, I felt down and out, depressingly out, having let everyone down. Not only Mosey, but Bernie and Mom too: most of all, myself. Another strange thing: I felt a curious sensation of having betrayed my special friends down there, my books. For I suddenly realized that all those silent dusty novels had become my chums in these months, and now, they were like so many witnesses to my cruddy behavior! It was the creepiest of feelings, you see, as though I were on trial, and here were my jurors–Hergesheimer and Hewlett, Archibazoff and Zweig, Hilton and Hobson, all of them, high and low! (And what about Mr. Barrett?) Oh, it stung me, humiliated me!

For five or ten minutes I reeled among my used fiction, not quite in control of myself, stopping at Balax, Belloc, Bellow, Burton and asking for what?

And when I went upstairs, to that huge high-ceilinged hall of nonfiction, it struck me as a prison, a dark and vaulted chamber to hold me forever. Should I take off there and then and say goodbye quickly? Leave a brief note of simple resignation? Haunted by full houses and red flushes, pursued by Southern drawls and flare skirts, taunted by Spats and the porno film, I moved from lightchain to lightchain, padlock to padlock, door to door: I vowed never again to set foot in Jackson's den, where I had lost my money, my honor, and my special feeling of comradeship in the basement.

Finally I managed to shut the front door, lock up the outside and pull down the black iron shutter, and turn away, off, to the streets. In the darkened evening, strangers passed (scornful, sarcastic looks?), the wind tossed, and the curving lampposts resembled city gallows. Dumbly I prowled about in the emptying streets, seeking. . . refuge, penance, understanding? From myself, for myself. Shaking with self-torment, I wondered if I were any longer real, or maybe only a figment of my own excessive reading? I mean, I was burning with a new intensity of some sort. After an hour or more of meandering aimlessly in streets that I normally would not have entered at night, having been accosted by a man selling a packet here, a woman there, I made my way back, and down into the subway, and soon was being hurtled underground from Manhattan to Brooklyn, memories of dark pleasure flickering alongside afflictions of dereliction.

(. . . .)

To my surprise, maybe dismay, no one seemed to know a thing or sense anything different about me the next day, or the next week at Schulte's. (In fact it was only I who noticed that I had left Americana unlocked the night before.) While I, feeling a guilty traitor, went about my rou-

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tine with new determination and stricter discipline, everyone behaved the same more or less. Apparently Jackson had let on to no one what had occurred, only winking at me when we passed each other once by the elevator, a wink of conspiracy. About my debt to him, he said nothing. To Bernie, of course, I had to say something, so I acknowledged that I had lost, though I omitted the amount. I added that they had treated me okay over there.

"You seem pretty matter-of-fact about the whole thing," he remarked chomping on a corned beef sandwich on Monday.

"Yeah, I guess it was kind of . . . disappointing. Not as exciting as I had imagined."

Hitting my arm, he noted, "I knew you weren't exactly any Legs Diamond."

I said nothing, and returned to my sorting and cataloguing.

On Thursday, my despair still filling me, the literary man with the gruff voice and gray fedora came around, and asked how I was getting on.

"Fine, Mr. Barrett, just fine."

"Did you get to that Rimbaud?" he faced me sternly.

"Yes, I did actually."

"And–the verdict?"

I nodded. "He was all right, really all right. Had a mind of his own. Wrote his own way. Moved around a bit too. And," I tried to think of the right words, but what came out surprised me, "he did a good job of fucking up, didn't he? If you'll excuse the language."

A hearty laugh was his response, and he proceeded to sit on the bench alongside me, removing his hat. "Who doesn't who's anybody?"

I stared at him, in disbelief. "Really?"

"Really. I've done some of that myself." He had a high forehead, I saw now, and a kind of oval pallid face, and if he had worn a high collar, he would have been a dead ringer for a priest. Was he putting me on now, trying to make me feel better?

"Maybe only those who do mess up, or fuck up as you say, will be able to tell us something new–about feelings, morals, conduct." His small gray eyes fixed me, as though to ask, "What do you think?"

"Well, I'll tell you something then, sir–I'm not sure you have to go so far away, as far as Rimbaud did, to make a real mess of things, see? I mean you can do it right here, right under your nose."

He smiled, folded his arms, said, "Yes, go on."

"Well, maybe that's about it, I mean, I enjoyed, no that's not really the right word–did you really fuck up a lot in your life, a man like you?" Was I getting too bold, my curiosity reaching too far?

The smile changed on his face, and he paused, in mid-expression I

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thought, to reflect. Then he began, "Look, I once loved a woman, and never married her, for the wrong reason. I even gave her up, for another woman whom I didn't feel passionate about, but who had the right social standing. Is that good enough?" He half grinned, derisively, at himself.

I took that in, tried to register it, observing his tweedy jacket sleeve next to my cruddy redblack flannel shirt. "How about messing up in a cheap, vulgar way?" I put, trying to edge through the protective fence he was constructing for my benefit. "Where you fail yourself in a, a–"

"All the time, son," he said easily. "I'm a writer, remember. That's what you do as a writer, in one way or another."

A writer? "I thought you just wrote literary criticism stuff?"

He laughed, happily now. "That, too." Then he seemed to sigh, remembering something, and stood up, wearily.

I stood with him, feeling how Green-street large he was.

"Well, are you ready for another book?"

"Sure, though I've still got another hundred pages or so of *Augie March,* and then there's the poetry of Rimbaud for me to get to. But that's not too much."

"Here, come with me." He proceeded to circle round the aisles until he came to the M's, and there, two bookcases in, found a book, and handed it to me.

"Pretty thick again," I observed, handling the battered book, and read aloud the title. "*Of Human Bondage.* Gosh, how'd he think of that?"

"Spinoza thought of it for him," Mr. Barrett explained. "The title of one of his books of ethics. Look at the pictures if you get bored with the text," he smiled.

"I'll try to do both, actually," peeking at the shaded pen and ink illustrations.

"Good. And we'll talk further. You should think more carefully why you like or dislike this book. Maybe make a small list of things? And you should think about college, too, you know."

"Really? Well, maybe, after sailing around a bit."

He nodded, and walked on ahead, with me following.

At the stairway he stopped. "She was Jewish, that woman. Like you, I expect."

"Huh? Yeah, I am."

"And I was somewhat ashamed of that." He faced me squarely. "I was a prig, a Waspish prig. Your father, Polish or Russian? And an immigrant?"

"Yes, a Russian immigrant." Not the right moment to ask him the meaning of that odd phrase.

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"Hers was Polish, I believe." He draped his arm around my shoulder, appearing to be on the verge of delivering some other words, some deeper confession. . . .

But then he wavered, paused, and gave me a quick goodbye wave, as he ascended the rickety steps, and moved out.

If it were true, what he had said, then he knew more about "messing up" and regretting it, than I did, *by far*. The whole conversation, his spoken words and his deliberate retreat from words, stayed with me.

From Bernie I found out about "Waspish prig," and from Maugham, I found out about being gripped immediately by a story. Along with beginning the new novel, I also began developing a new determination, and even, a plan of sorts. One which surprised me.

On Tuesday night, when Bernie stayed late to close up, I asked him to "teach me how to drink." Ceasing his filing, he stared at me. "Have you gone nuts?"

"I want to learn how to hold the stuff."

Shrugging his sloping shoulders, in hopelessness, he mumbled, "After we close up at eight, we'll give it a shot. Boy, you do come up with some, doncha?"

The lesson began in Lewis's small office, where Professor Bernie Gross of Bensonhurst instructed me in Alcohol 1.1. Ground rules: "You take you first drink with crackers or cheese, not on an empty stomach. You don't 'imbibe' cheap stuff, especially cheapo wine–otherwise it's Big Hangover Time next morning. You don't mix drinks, meaning if you start with bourbon you stay with bourbon and don't also accept wine or scotch. What else? Cut a drink with water or soda, and you can nurse it longer. Capish? Okay. One last thing: if you want to protect your stomach a little, drink your liquor with milk in it, especially scotch."

When I stared in disbelief, he responded. "Yeah, it sounds goofy, but it works. Old Mosey taught me that one. Any questions before we begin the lab?"

"Yes. How do I get beyond the taste?"

"You're serious, aren't you? You schmuck! You get to like the taste, that's how. But gradually."

I nodded. "And what do I start with, scotch?"

"No, no. That'll take years. You could try uh rum and coke. Or seven and seven, that's Seagram's and–"

"Seven-Up," I said. "Jackson gave me a bit of that. Yeah, that taste was all right."

"You mean you couldn't taste the whiskey, right?"

"Right."

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He shook his head, in futility. "C'mon, we'll start in–I'll buy us a pint of something, wait right here. Cheesus, if Lewis ever saw us he'd hemorrhage."

While he took off, I read about Philip Carey beginning his lonely life, after the early death of his mother. The accompanying illustrations were detailed–lovely, captioned by the first, "You naughty boy, Miss Watkins will be cross with you."

Presently, in the dim cramped office, we were sipping Seagram's from two porcelain teacups, amidst Velveeta chunks and Ritz crackers, sitting by the rolltop desk like two British officers in some remote outpost.

"How is it?" Bernie asked, picking up my book.

"Excellent. Though I've just really begun it."

"The drink, dodo, the drink. Yeah, I've heard of this, but never got around to it. I'll wait till they make a good modern flick out of it. So. . . ?"

"Tastes good." I waited for the full blurry effect to take hold, but all that was happening was that I was coming to like the dark mahogany wainscotting, and the thin, jagged roads of oak in the desk.

"How many fingers do I have up?" he asked.

"Eleven," I answered.

He nodded. "Okay wise guy, but just hold on willya? Nurse the thing more. Sip a little at a time, otherwise, you'll be on your second. Lay the taste on your tongue" –and he held out his, to show me the way– "and sort of run it around your palate, slowly. Go ahead, just a touch. There you go. And tell me, what the hell is behind all this?"

I now took full notice, of letters of inquiry from Baghdad, Barbados, and Cyprus, and bills going out to Malta, Budapest, Chandigarh, distant places!

"Well?"

"Americana," I answered. "I wanted to turn native."

"Sure," he snickered, "Sure. More like you want to impress those whores over at Jackson's huh?"

Did I? I explained how I had indeed gotten drunk over at Jackson's that night, and didn't want to repeat the act.

"You want another tip, about visiting there again?"

"Sure."

"Stay away from the ladies. They ain't there just for decoration, or diddling, you realize."

"What do you mean?"

"Bozo. First they'll soften you up a little. And then, they might just be hanging around you when you're actually playing." He looked sideways at me, saw I wasn't quite getting it, and came to sit on the arm of my chair, almost tipping us over. "They might just be signalling the house, meaning the

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dealer, about your hand. Just now and then, when the pot's big enough, honey," and he ran his finger down my neck in imitation, before I pushed him off.

Christ, I thought, Christ! "I see," I nodded, not letting on about the full impact. Oh was I innocent, a real schnook! For payment, I forced a drink down too fast, and immediately began coughing like crazy.

"Take it easy, fella, or you'll burn yourself up before the next lesson."

Well for the next few weeks I worked hard, taking more drinking lessons, and getting familiar with the stuff. At the same time I was reading more about Philip's descent into peculiar slavery to the vulgar, anemic waitress, Mildred. What illness!

Two Fridays later, in late February, I was ready for Jackson's Hole again. Of course I had already paid him back his ten bucks, plus a buck interest, the past week. But having written me off as a player when I had skipped a week, he was surprised to see me reappear.

"Hey folks, look who's back," he announced to the gang.

Callie welcomed me warmly, and with her was a new woman. When I asked about Gen, Callie said, "Oh she might turn up yuh can nevah tell with that chick. A little high, a lot depressed, most of the time. She sorta liked you though. Hey, come on and tell us what's been happenin, this heah's Jacie." I said hello to the slim pretty woman, nodded to the two other men, including Olepal Spats or Cecil, and sat down. This time Bernie came on in too, which made me feel easier. Now the sounds of rock-and-roll and the blinking of neon lights and the lurid appeal of perfumey smoke didn't confuse or startle me. On the contrary, I felt prepared, ready, a kind of student of sin. And when the same routine prevailed, with Jackson asking about a movie while we waited for more hands, I said sure, and watched the flick come on. Ten minutes into it, however, and carefully nursing my one drink, I said I had forgotten something and made my way back out, and over to our side of the basement. There, I opened the Americana room, and entered, and quietly climbed the ladder back to my peephole post, viewing the situation. Seeing the movie on the wall, and hearing the same whirring and voices, here on the outside, made me feel curiously on top of things, apart. Now, I prayed, if I could only get the cards. . . .

But I didn't.

I waited and waited, I played and set the women aside, I stayed clear-headed and goody-goody, and still couldn't get the cards. Steadily, surely, I lost the twelve dollars that I put away for the game, and dipped into my weekly savings, accepting the punishment as my due. At one point I went to urinate, and stopped to look in on the small dark room of my dingy orgy just a few weeks back. On the wall the blowup photo of that faraway island with

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white beach, palm trees, and seagreen water was still there, still beckoning. And through the next hour and a half on my steady losing, the color photo hatched itself into a project, or rather, hastened my earlier plan. And even when, at the end, I picked myself up to go, a loser of nearly twenty-two dollars, I felt something else stirring, something larger than the night's poker game. I said goodnight to Bernie, who, a small winner, tried to offer consolation. "Nah," I rejected it, "It's okay, just not my night, I guess,"

Rumbling home on the subway, I lost myself in Philip's terrrible descent into disaster, thinking how maybe the timing was just right to read that book. Above and across the aisle, Uncle Sam, wearing his high top hat of stars and stripes, was pointing and inviting me to join the armed forces and see the world. Good end, wrong means. A man had fallen asleep over his crumpled *Post,* and the woman next to him, yawning with the long day's fatigue, now and then propped the man up on her shoulder delicately. For a fleeting moment I replaced Sam and his top hat with the gray fedora and oval face of Mr. Barrett, who was peering down at me with a different, sterner message, What was it, I wondered, leaning forward. And what was that deeper confession he was about to make that day, but never did–aloud, anyway? The IRT swerved suddenly and almost tossed me from my prickly seat, jolting my reverie away, and I sat back, with new thoughts and my book. I read: "Philip had few friends. His habit of reading isolated him: it became such a need that after being in company for some time he grew tired and restless." Was reading really so dangerous, I asked myself. Literature more slippery say than reality?

On Friday next, after a week more of planning and reading, I returned to Jackson's. An hour into the game, I was mired in the same pattern, losing ground and my money quietly. I shooed the ladies away, Callie making a face at me, and sipped my whiskey. Down to my last few dollars, I took a shot with my three eights and raised the two high pair showing of Spats; sure enough, he had just the two pair. Beginning with that hand and sizeable pot, I turned my luck around. For an hour I got the cards, I had my run. Three aces beating out Jackson's three kings (oh, that stung!). A full house spoiling another player's flush. Pulling a seven for an inside straight in five card. You know, the works. Oh it was running all right, and I was riding right with it, not bothering with Callie's presence or Bernie's absence, not distracted by pornography or Jim Beam, bad jokes or bad looks. Holding my concentration fixed on the cards, remembering as best as I could all the cards showing from that hand and from the deck's previous hands, I galloped on that streaking horse. And before I knew it, I was hearing the grunts of the players, seeing the expressions turn hostile, and feeling the piles of dough climb and climb. One for singles, the other for fives, tens, and one twenty.

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And the second was getting higher than the first. I was rich, friends, rich!

Now, I told myself, get out, old Schlossy boy, out. Move up and out. But how? I waited for a simple, quiet loss, checked my watch and pulled up my stakes and waved myself out of the next deal. "Sorry, that's it for tonight. I have an appointment."

The four players, taken by surprise, and maybe by the appointment, seemed startled.

I began packing in the piles.

"Yuh just can't quit on us, yuh know–not with our loot in your pocket!" declared a round fellow with a cigar in his cheeks.

Tingling, I gathered my nerves as best as possible. "Sure I can, if I want to. A few weeks ago, man," –I inserted the little noun for some reason– "you guys took my money, and now it's my turn."

A short wiry black fellow, the kind that scared me the most ever since, as a kid, I had seen one slash a fellow's face with a concealed razor in his matches, stood up, and came toward me. I stood my ground and he moved to a few inches of my face, twirling his toothpick in his mouth as though it might go off at any moment. "Yuh all looking for some trouble, quittin on us suddenly, jes like that?"

From the speakers, Sam Cook was singing about sweet sixteen, and I held my tongue, counting to six, feeling terror climb my back. Looking at his shining brown eyes, I said, low, "I'm not looking for any trouble. But for tonight, I happen to have an appointment." An imaginary Mosey winked at me.

If the fellow had snapped at me, or done worse, I don't know what I would have done. His foul breath spilled over me, and I accepted that, and also the menace of his nearness, which seemed to last and last.

Jackson stepped in between us, and eased him back, away. "Hey Jonesay, the boy's got a right to quit, win or lose," and turning to me he said, "But you shoulda let us know aforehand that you had an appointment, sport. Come on now, I'll walk you out." Without looking back, but feeling the heat on me, I proceeded toward the elevator, and escape. Jackson whispered, "Yuh got some nice little pussy waitin for you, huh Aaron?"

I nodded.

"Sho, I dig. Just come back soon and give the boys a chance to get even now. So Jonesy don't stay angry." He patted my back, still stiff with tension.

I nodded, said sure, and recrossed the elevator floor, back onto home ground. Fiction boy again. This time I closed up shop with a different feeling, and I was sorry that Bernie wasn't around, to celebrate with. But my novels were, and so I shared it with them, preening and promenading through the

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aisles like a racehorse after a big win.

Outside the store, I felt firm, free and easy, and didn't mind looking strangers straight in the eye. But no wandering for me that night, just a beeline for the subway, my money stuffed down into my front dungaree pocket. The only stop I made was to check out my typewriter in Broadway Office Supplies; there it was, still Royal, still sharp. I could feel the keys on the tips of my fingers.

Later, at home, alone with my chicken dinner waiting in a pot and a note from my mother about how to cook it–she and Sam had gone off to Connecticut for the weekend–I counted my take. One hundred thirty-five dollars and sixty cents. I whistled at the sum. For one night's work, a few hours really, I had hit the jackpot. Without committing any crime! I sat in our old kitchen, happy with oilcloth, old stove, pale yellow paint peeling, and ate the meal very slowly. I was tasting a victory whose flavors were new to me, and not entirely distinguishable.

For the rest of the evening, my heart fluttered with excitement over my outlandish booty. (In my thesaurus, I looked up prize, and found booty, a word I decided to use for myself.) Even the Friday night fight, with Don Dumphy speeding through each round of Willie Pep's fainting, ducking, and jabbing, couldn't cool me down. Through three or four hours I daydreamed of high adventure, while simultaneously trying to follow Philip Carey's low one. I was being hit by all sorts of impulses, and prowled our three-room apartment looking for definition and resolution. Yes, my plan had to be firmed up, put into motion, and soon, I realized. First, I had to find out about some local particulars.

Before work the next morning I laid out an envelope for Mom with twenty-five bucks, making up for the week I had lost, plus some.

Up at Schulte's, I handed Mosey an envelope too, saying, "Here's some dough, pay me back sometime." He was having to work the extra day nowadays, to make up for his poker loss.

"Huh? You crazy boy? What the hell you pullin?"

"Nothing. What you lost a few weeks ago in poker here," I shrugged, "I made up over at Jackson's last night. That's all. So go ahead and pocket it. When you get hot, you can return the dough."

"Jackson's, you?" He shot me a fishy look, opened the envelope, and handed the two tens and a five, and shook his head. "You sho is a fruitcake, aint you? From Jackson, that crooked fucker, Huh? Well then I don't mind takin out a loan. Thanks, Aaron, thanks. First lucky day I get, you get this back, you heah?"

"Sure, Mosey, sure," I answered, knowing that he hadn't had one of those days in years, and wasn't likely to. Luck was not simply a matter of

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luck, I was discovering.

"Is he crooked?" I asked.

"Like a three dollar bill, that's all. If the ladies don't get yah, the cards will. He marks 'em, you know, once he's got the sucker hooked."

I smiled, patted his shoulder, wondering if Bernie was such a sucker.

Throughout the morning I labored industriously to clean up some of the longest lingering piles and bulging cartons, and made some decent headway. (Despite taking a small break when I came upon a Heritage Press *Moby Dick* and couldn't resist peering at the marvelous drawings.) What would all my dusty novels do without me? In the afternoon, Bernie came around, asked how I had done, and I said "Won."

Lighting a cigarette, he continued. "Oh yeah, how much?"

I announced the sum.

He kept the flame burning and looked at me. "You putting me on?"

When I assured him I wasn't, he took hold of my arm, and said, "So I'm the one who should be taking lessons, huh?" Suddenly speaking with new respect, he said, "You know, I had you pegged for a deadbeat, an egghead in the making, but you're turning out okay, really okay." A broad smile appeared. "Oh, I wish I had been there to see their mugs when you bid them 'adieu.' I never got that lucky. Hey, what're you gonna do with that kind of loot? Wanna try to go for broke with the ponies on Tuesday night?"

"Thanks, Bern, I have some other plans for it." I'd pass along Mosey's warning next week sometime.

Meanwhile, the next week, in March, I began to take care of those plans. On Monday, on the way to work, I stopped to pick up my new typewriter. A battleship gray color, clean as a whistle with a new ribbon too, with a speckled gray carrying case, it was a sight and feel to behold, and I took to it like a farmboy getting a new mare.

Naturally I tried it out right off, right there on Mosey's table; the keys were high and separate, and the print elite, my favorite. Mosey shook my hand and said, "If Jackson helped to buy that for you, it should type extra sweet, man." Later, the other boys came around, and admired it too.

On the subway home that evening, I guarded it carefully, my hands or legs feeling it at every moment. At the entrance to my apartment building, Steven Werter noticed it immediately, and said, "Looks new, a present for your birthday?"

I smiled, sort of. "A present, from myself to myself."

His eyes widened, and he half nodded, "Didn't know you earned that kind of dough at a *bookstore*."

My mother was near amazed, and skeptical too. Did I really need it? Though she conceded, "It's your money, though. Did you get a guarantee?"

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Sam of course, when he saw it at dinner, asked if I had purchased it "hot" uptown somewhere, "How'd you save that kind of money?"

"Overtime," I assured him, "plus a good poker game."

He laughed at that. "Yeah, you poker. It probably would be the best thing for you actually."

On Tuesday I took a longer sidetrack, before work. In downtown Brooklyn I got off the train, and walked along Atlantic Avenue to an anonymous-looking brick building on a narrow street. There, in a large ballroom-sized room, thirty or forty fellows lounged about, many scraggly looking, dirty blonde, youngish. A stubble-bearded fellow pointed out the tiny office in one corner, where a small sign said, Scandinavian Seaman's Institute. At the counter I waited, and asked the gentleman how I could get a boat out.

"Ships, they're called," he corrected me. "You have your American passport?"

"Not yet," I murmured, reddening at my mistake.

"Get that first," he said in singsong English, "Then you can have a look at the board over here. Ships and jobs are listed on the cards." And he turned away.

On a hung cork bulletin board alongside the office, 3 x 5 cards were posted, listing not merely the ships and jobs, but also, dreams. They were called: Dakar and Lagos, Yokohama and Rotterdam, Oslo and Hamburg. Right there in the heart of Brooklyn! When my brain and heart stopped ferris-wheeling, in a few minutes, I noted the positions and returned to the busy, brusque man.

"Excuse me again," I interrupted him, "but which of these am I qualified for?" "With a passport, you can be deck boy, kitchen helper, engine room assistant."

"Is *dekksgutt* the deck boy? What's he do?"

He nodded at the first query, and advised me to ask one of the seamen about the tasks involved, and turned back brusquely to his business.

I found a blonde fellow of thirty, an "AB" (or "able-bodied seaman," as he explained), who told me about the *dekksgutt* chores: helping out on deck everywhere, chipping paint, cleaning latrines, handling ropes, "Maybe taking a watch," whatever the "bozzen" wanted.

I gulped it all in, too excited to ask all the details. As I was leaving, he stopped me, and said very solemnly, "Sign on for one trip, maybe three or four months, but not longer. Then you come ashore before you sign on again. You understand?"

"Yes. But why?"

"Because otherwise you get too use to sea, and to ships, and you can't never stay on land for too long. It's not a good life. So," he smiled gaptoothed,

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"one trip, and then, if you wish, maybe a year later, another one." He nodded, with regret. "Otherwise, you get. . . I don't know the word in English," and he motioned with his hand.

Later that day, Lewis said, "You seem quite chipper today. And yesterday."

"A good weekend, I guess."

"Oh yes," he said, stopping me for a moment, about to strike my heart with his revelation, "You've been doing a fine job, so I've raised you twenty cents an hour beginning next month. Congratulations."

Surprised, even shocked, I stumbled out "Thank you," not daring to tell him of my plan.

Sallow-faced in his gray windbreaker, he continued, "Everyone agrees you've been the best fiction boy we've had down there in years. Keep up the good work!" and he flashed his best nicotine smile at me, before moving on, a cadaver-in-good-cheer.

That week, after making application for my passport, I wrote a letter to the literary gentleman, in case I missed him. I wrote the letter on my Royal, of course, my first real workout on it.

"Thanks Mr. Barrett for your course in reading, sorry it was so brief. (I'm enjoying *Of Human Bondage* very much, though I think Mr. Maugham is quite a pessimist. Is this a 'fault' in the book, sir?) On my journey, which is approaching, I'm certainly going to continue the reading. I'm off, you see, in a month or six weeks, as soon as I can get my passport, for some distant destination–though I don't know yet where, or for how long. As for college, well, if I'm going to write someday, I don't really need college, we both agree. I mean, I have to get educated in the school of hard knocks first, right? I've also got a start there, as you may remember, and it really does make an *impression*, for sure. Thanks a lot for your counsel that day, about your own experience; it proved helpful, more than you may know. I bounced back after being rather down.

If I may, I'll look you up when I get back, maybe through George?–if I get back before ten years, as I believe I will. And I'll certainly let you know about my adventures, which may be. . . . "

I couldn't think of what to put in there, so I just left in the four dots, like they did in the books. I signed it, "Aaron Scholssberg, from Brooklyn not Charleville." The typing gave me as much pleasure as the contents.

Nearly a month went by, spring began in earnest with the Dodgers opening in Ebbets Field, while I waited for my magical object, like my old Captain Midnight badge, to arrive: my passport. (I also checked in at the nurse's office in school, and, from fishy-eyed Mrs. Wallace, got the proper forms for a medical leave of absence.) One Friday evening I returned to

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Jackson's game, not really to gamble but to show up. I lost a few bucks, but it was my presence that meant something to the players. Privately, Callie handed me a phone number, from Gennifer, and I didn't know what to make of it. And in the fiction department, I was making serious headway in the backlog of books, including a card catalogue for the unshelved stuff. Meanwhile, I kept up with Philip Carey's descent into disaster with the grim Mildred. Could anyone that smart be that dumb, that driven? Was that Philip's case in particular, or the way it worked out frequently?

Mr. Barrett grimaced when I put that to him, in his mid-April appearance in the basement. "Oh, it happens more often than 'smart men' will acknowledge, I'm afraid."

I found my letter and handed it over to him, saying, "Just in case I didn't see you." He opened and read it.

"Does the pessimism hurt the book? Well, if it interferes with the characters. If it doesn't seem to come from *within* the characters and their story. Does it, in you opinion?"

Reflecting, I answered. "Well, yes and no, sir. Some of the time, yes, but, some other times, not. Sometimes . . . Mr. Maugham just sort of sticks in sentences of gloom from nowhere really, except from himself I guess. Yeah."

He nodded. "Right there, it gets weak, I would think. Sometimes an author can't resist competing with his characters, and it creates a bit of a problem." He paused, gazed at me quizzically. "What about this journey of yours?"

Well, there wasn't much to tell yet. I explained how I was waiting for the passport, about the Scandinavian Seaman's Institute and its "ships," and the far off destinations awaiting me maybe. "But please," I whispered, "all this is kind of a secret, or private between us. No one here knows anything just yet."

An approving nod. "Mum's the word, I promise. You have . . . courage."

"More like curiosity," I answered. "A lot of curiosity."

"And determination." He stared at me, from beneath those curtaining eyebrows.

From somewhere in me a recent line popped out, "Man makes his own fate, huh? That's what Augie March says."

Taking that in, he patted my shoulder. Then, making space on a shelf, he scribbled something down on a looseleaf notepad, and tore out the page. "Here, my home address, and private phone number. Don't lose it, it's unlisted. When you return, call or write me, and we'll get together. I want to hear about *your* fate."

Unlisted phone? Why? "I don't really know what Augie means by

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that," I admitted. "But I'm working on it. Boy, you live all the way over in Jersey. How come?"

"It's not exactly France, you realize," he offered. "A little less than an hour, and I'm here. How long does it take you, from Brooklyn?"

"Maybe a little longer," I nodded.

"Have you been on the other side of the Hudson?"

Like the other side of Americana? I wondered. "Never in Jersey, no."

"You're invited then. By the way, I think I have the perfect book for you to take on your voyage. Let's see if it's in." He curled around the aisles, turning into the D's. "Look, we got lucky." He handed it over to me. "A going-away present from me. I'll buy it upstairs."

I read, "*Two Years Before the Mast*, Richard Henry Dana. We never get calls for that."

He shook his head. "An American boy's classic, in my time. I don't know if it's read much anymore. Too bad. You try it, and tell me what you think."

"Thank you. I will." And later, after he had given me the book, and shaken my hand goodbye, I noticed he had signed it, with an inscription. The small legible script said, "To Aaron, a fine fiction boy on his way to great adventures, Cordially, Charles Edmund Barrett. Schulte's, April 1955." Well, that excited me sort of, and I decided to include it along with my other valuable signatures, like those of Robinson, Reese, Campanella. Oh, I would hate to miss the baseball season, with the Bums so terrific, but it had to be. Carefully I set aside Mr. Barrett's home phone and address, and placed *Two Years* into my knapsack, along with two pads and a pen and pencil case for the trip.

When the passport arrived the second week in May, I think I grew six inches from excitement, for it seemed, in its official manila envelope with the United States of America printed in the corner and a warning to "Return to Sender" if Aaron Scholsberg wasn't there to accept it himself, that my journey, my "great adventures," were actually beginning.

On my way to work on that Thursday afternoon, I stopped again at the SSI, and amidst a blur of seamen's advice and gossip, white index cards with exotic destinations, Norwegian and Swedish accents, and my own leaping blood, I signed on to leave the next morning at 9:30 a.m., for the Ivory Coast of Africa, with stops at Dakar, Lagos, Monrovia, Lobito, Loando, Matadi, among others.

I didn't have too much time, did I?. . . .

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Robert Alter

ON S. Y. AGNON

Shira is S. Y. Agnon's culminating effort to articulate through the comprehensive form of the novel his vision of the role of art in human reality. It engaged him with long interruptions, during which he devoted himself to shorter fiction, for almost a quarter of a century. On his deathbed in 1970, he gave his daughter instructions to publish the novel with Book Four still incomplete. Posthumously, the text of *Shira* remains unstable. The first Hebrew edition in 1971 ends with the fragmentary ninth chapter of Book Four, which includes Herbst's musings on the professor of medicine who injects himself with a dangerous disease in order to find a cure–a historical figure at the Hebrew University, Shal Adler–and breaks off with the narrator's declaration that Shira has disappeared and cannot be found. A subsequent edition in 1974 appended the brief episode Agnon had marked in manuscript as "Last Chapter," in which Herbst joins Shira in the leper hospital; this ending was originally intended to conclude Book Three but was set aside when Agnon went on to write a fourth book. In 1978, another substantial episode, like "Last Chapter" incorporated in the present version, was published: corresponding in fictional time to Chapters 8 through 19 of Book Three, it prepares the way for Herbst's discovery of Shira in the leper hospital and also explores a narrative possibility not raised elsewhere–Herbst's confession of his infidelity to his wife.

Incomplete as it is, and even with some signs of uncertainty in its digressive and repetitive patterns, *Shira* is a remarkable work. The psychosexual realism–most strikingly evident in Herbst's guilt-ridden, violence-prone, sadomasochistic dreams and fantasies–surpasses anything else Agnon did in this vein. What may have prevented him from finishing the book was that beyond any aim of realistic representation of psyche and social milieu, Agnon wanted to imagine in concrete novelistic detail the ultimate relation of art (or "poetry," the meaning of Shira's name) to truth, or, in regard to genre, to pass through the dense medium of realism to allegory, and that was a consummation that eluded him.

It may be helpful to place *Shira* in Agnon's chronological development as a novelist. His earliest Hebrew fiction (there had been a few Yiddish stories before) was published in the half-dozen years after his arrival in

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Editor's Note: Copyright © 1989 by Robert Alter. From the Afterword to *Shira* by S. Y. Agnon, to be published by Schocken Books in October 1989.

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Palestine from Galicia in 1907 at the age of nineteen, and consisted entirely of short stories and novellas. Many of these were in the subtly ventriloquistic mode of a traditional Hebrew teller of tales, and it was this identity that figured in most readers' minds as Agnon rapidly made himself a commanding figure in Hebrew prose. Characteristically, his artfully archaizing novella set in premodern Galicia, *And the Crooked Shall Be Straight* (1912) was widely perceived in these years as his emblematic achievement. In 1913 Agnon left Palestine for Germany, ostensibly for a brief stay, but the war and a variety of personal reasons held him there until 1924. It is during the first few years of his German sojourn that he arrives at artistic maturity, rigorously revising his often effusive early stories in a precise, understated, classicizing prose that would remain his hallmark. Shortly after the war, he was working on his first novel, an autobiographical fiction he called *In the Bond of Life*. Though he announced in a letter written in 1920 that it would soon be in print, he must have had difficulties with it because it was still in manuscript in 1924 when it was destroyed in a fire that devastated his apartment in Homburg, and Agnon never attempted to reconstruct the book. His first long integrated work, *The Bridal Canopy* (1931, English translation, 1967) is only marginally a novel because it reverts to the medieval and Renaissance form of the frame-story–the peregrinations of a protagonist and his companion–into which is introduced a variegated abundance of anecdotes, fables, tall tales, and the like.

Meanwhile, Agnon continued to write realistic short fiction far removed from both the eighteenth-century setting and the formal traditionalism of *The Bridal Canopy*, and this involvement in social and psychological realism culminated in his first proper novella, *A Simple Story* (1935, English translation, 1985), a book more restricted in scope than the novels that would follow but, in the rendering of the evolution of a psychosis and its ironically qualified cure, probably the most flawlessly sustained of all his novels. From this point on, though he continued to experiment with different modes of short fiction,from anecdotal and reminiscent to surrealist and symbolic, his commitment to the capaciousness of the novel form was clear. In 1939, writing with uncharacteristic rapidity, he produced *A Guest for the Night* (English translation, 1968), his personal confrontation, on the eve of the Second World War, with the inward dying of European Judaism. In 1945 he brought out an even more ambitiously original novel, *Just Yesterday* (still untranslated), set in the Palestine he had encountered as a very young man, in which he combines historical realism with intricate symbolism and tragic-grotesque humor (some of the most remarkable chapters, initially composed in the early thirties, follow the canine viewpoint of a Jerusalem mongrel named Balak, who proves to be the most philosophically reflective and the most engaging

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character in the book).

In each of the three novels Agnon published from 1935 to 1945, he had found ways to go strikingly beyond his previous work in the fashioning of new fictional forms and in the range of themes he was able to sound. It was clearly his intention to go beyond himself once again in *Shira*, and he apparently set to work on the new novel not long after the appearance of *Just Yesterday*. Between 1949 and 1952, he published chapters of *Shira* in a literary yearbook issued by the newspaper Ha'aretz, material corresponding to most of Book One and Book Two of the novel as we have it. The excitement roused in Hebrew literary circles was then frustrated as Agnon confined the continuation of *Shira* to the privacy of his drawer, pursuing other projects in print. In 1966, after he received the Nobel Prize, he allowed two more chapters to appear, and, with failing physical powers, he was working on *Shira* in his last years, still hoping to forge it into what it would in any case, even incomplete, prove to be–his great last testament as a writer.

Shira is at once Agnon's fullest invocation of the nineteenth-century European novel and a deliberate modernist demonstration of the collapse of the thematic concerns and formal strategies of the nineteenth-century novel. Adultery as an attempted escape from the flatness and the stifling routine of bourgeois society is, of course, one of the two or three great recurrent themes of the traditional novel. One could not have chosen a more thoroughly bourgeois realm in the Palestine of the 1930s than the milieu of the Hebrew University with its predominantly German-Jewish professorate, where propriety, conformism, industriousness, self-importance, and social status were the governing values. Agnon, who lived on the margins of the Hebrew University, some of his best friends being members of its faculty, knew this world well and rendered it in his last novel with a shrewd satiric eye. *Shira,* however, turns out to be something quite different from a latter-day Hebrew reprise of *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* in an academic setting. Herbst, unlike Flaubert's Emma, does not "discover in adultery all the platitudes of married life" but, on the contrary, finds that a fleeting carnal encounter with an unlikely object of desire opens up vertiginous new perspectives, makes bourgeois hearth and home unlivable for him, impels him in ways he is hardly conscious of to do something radically other with his life.

The background of political violence is one of the keys to the difference between *Shira* and the tradition of the European novel that it recalls. The bourgeois academic world from which Manfred Herbst derives is not a fixed datum of social reality, as would be the case in a nineteenth-century novel, but is seen instead as a fragile choreography of complacent social rituals on the brink of a historical abyss. The novel is set in the late thirties, in the midst

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of the murderous Arab attacks on the Jewish population of Palestine that began in 1936. The ideological tension between Jewish militants, like the underground group to which Herbst's daughter Tamara belongs, and the pacifists of the Brit Shalom organization at the Hebrew University, is frequently involved. On the European horizon that has the most urgent thematic relevance to all that transpires in the Jerusalem setting of the novel, Herbst's German homeland is preparing the machinery for genocide. In a world moving rapidly from episodic terror to systematic mass murder on the most unprecedented scale, mere private experience–the staple of the classic novel–dwindles to insignificance. Adultery can no longer be even the illusory personal adventure it was in nineteenth-century fiction, and the very premise of the linear plot of the novel of adultery is called into question: Herbst's involvement with Shira cannot go anywhere as a developing chain of fictional events; instead, he circles around and around the idea of Shira, or, what amounts to the same thing, around what Shira's disturbing presence has released within him.

Let me state this in terms of the quest for knowledge that is a central issue in the novel. Herbst and his fellow cultivators of the grove of academe, equipped with their index-cards and bibliographies and learned journals, sedulously pursue the most esoteric and distant objects of knowledge–the burial customs of ancient Byzantium, the alphabets of long-lost languages. The purported sphere of these objects of knowledge is history, but do these historical investigations, beyond their utility in advancing the careers of the investigators, tell us anything essential about the historical forces that are about to move the German nation to gun down, gas, and incinerate millions of men, women, and children? The European perpetrators of these horrors are, after all, at least in part products of the same academic culture as Herbst and his colleagues. The most troubling question a Jewish writer after 1945 could raise is variously intimated here, particularly in Herbst's nightmares and hallucinations: could there be a subterranean connection between forces at work, however repressed, within the civilized Jew and the planners and executors of mass murder who are, after all, men like you and me? At the beginning of the novel, Herbst is unable to write that big second book which will earn him his professorship because he has a writer's block. As the effects of his exposure to Shira sink in, he is unable to write it because it has become pointless, such knowledge as could be realized through it felt to be irrelevant. Instead, Herbst hits on the desperate idea of writing a tragedy, for his experience with the radical ambiguity of eros in his involvement with Shira/poetry leads him to sense that art, unlike historical inquiry, has the capacity to produce probing, painful self-knowledge, and is able to envisage history not as a sequence of documented events but as a terrible interplay of

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energies of love and death, health and ghastly sickness. Herbst, with his habits of academic timidity, his hesitant and unfocused character, may not ever be capable of creating such exacting art, but he is ineluctably drawn to the idea of it.

The underlying concern with the nature of art in *Shira* is reflected in its wealth of references–elsewhere in Agnon's fiction, scrupulously avoided–to European writers: Goethe, Nietzsche, Balzac, Rilke, Gottfried Keller, Stefan George, not to speak of the Greek tragedians and their German scholarly expositors whom Herbst reviews in his quixotic attempt to write a tragedy (ostensibly, a historical drama set in the Byzantine period but unconsciously a reflection of his own agonizing erotic dilemma with Shira). From one point of view, this is a novel about the impossibility of tragedy in the modern age, and especially after the advent of Hitler–that is to say, the impossibility of a literary form that assigns meaning to suffering, or represents an experience of transcendence through suffering. In consonance with this concern with tragedy, a good deal of weight is given to Nietzsche's notion in *The Birth of Tragedy* of the roots of the genre in an experience of violent primal forces contained by artistic form–Herbst, preeminently a "Socratic" man in Nietzsche's negative characterization of German academic culture, at one point runs across a first edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* in an antiquarian bookshop.

Another manifestation of Agnon's preoccupation here with the way art illuminates reality is the attention devoted to painting, again, a thoroughly uncharacteristic emphasis in his fiction. Three painters figure significantly in the novel: Rembrandt and Böcklin, who recur as motifs in connection with Shira, and the anonymous artist from the school of Breughel responsible for the stupendous canvas of the leper and the townscape (III:16) that constitutes Herbst's great moment of terrifying and alluring revelation. A look at how the three painters interact in the novel may suggest something of what Agnon was trying to say about art, and perhaps also why he found his way to a conclusion of the novel ultimately blocked.

If art, or poetry, is a route to knowledge radically different from the academic enterprise that has been Herbst's world, Agnon sees as its defining characteristic a capacity to fuse antinomies, to break down the logically marked categories–Herbst's boxes full of carefully inscribed research notes–presupposed by scholarly investigation. The Breughelian painting Herbst discovers at the antiquarian's is a multiple transgression of the borderlines of reason, and that, he realizes, is the power of its truthful vision. The leper's eye-sockets are mostly eaten away by the disease, yet they are alive and seek life–a paradox that reenacts the underlying achievement of the painter, "who succeeded in breathing the spirit of life into the inanimate." The medium of the painting is of course silent, but Herbst, contemplating the warning bell

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held by the leper, experiences a kind of synesthetic hallucination, hears the terrible clanging sound and feels the waves of the disease radiating out from the leper's hand. The painting from the school of Breughel, as I have proposed elsewhere, * is in its formal and thematic deployment a model for the kind of art embodied in *Shira* itself: in the foreground, the horrific and compelling figure of the diseased person, intimating an impending cataclysm; in the background, half out of focus, the oblivious burghers complacently going about their daily pursuits. Agnon gives us not only the art work but also an exemplary audience for it in Herbst. The historian of Byzantium is mesmerized by the painting in a paradoxically double way: ". . . he looked again and again with terrified eyes and eager soul." The painting at once scares him and translates him to an unwonted plane of experience because it both speaks eloquently to a universal truth of human experience and gives him back a potent image, of which he is scarcely conscious, of his own life.

Seeking relief from the terrible intensity of the Breughelian painting, Herbst flips through a stack of Rembrandt reproductions and comes to *The Night Watch,* on which he dwells. Rembrandt would seem to present a kind of art antithetical to that of the anonymous painter from the school of Breughel. The narrator tells us that Herbst now experiences a sense of melancholy accompanied by "inner tranquillity" (*menukhat hanefesh*, literally, "soul's rest"), a tranquillity usually identified as harmony but which he, the narrator, prefers to associate with the illumination of knowledge. The opposition, however, between Rembrandtian and Breughelian art rapidly dissolves, like most of the key oppositions in the novel. To begin with, *The Night Watch* immediately makes Herbst think of Shira, who had been looking for a reproduction of the painting, and she is doubly associated with disease–the wasting disease which by this point we suspect she has contracted, and her hapless lover's disease of the spirit manifested in his obsessive relationship with her. But a few minutes later in narrated time, Herbst suddenly realizes that his memory has played a trick on him, or, in the psychoanalytic terms never far from Agnon's way of conceiving things from the thirties onward, he has temporarily repressed something. It was not *The Night Watch,* with its beautifully composed sense of confident procession, that Shira wanted, but another Rembrandt painting, *The Anatomy Lesson.* The clinical subject of the latter painting might of course have a certain professional appeal to Shira as a nurse, but what is more important is that its central subject is not living men marching but a cadaver, and thus it is linked with the representation of the

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* "A Novel of the Post-Tragic World," in my book, *Defenses of the Imagination* (Philadelphia, 1977)

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living-dead leper in the anonymous canvas.

Death as a subject in turn connects Rembrandt with Böcklin, the artist responsible for the painting of the death's-head that Shira keeps in her apartment. Arnold Böcklin, a Swiss painter much in fashion in Central Europe toward the end of the nineteenth century (Stefan George wrote a poem about him), provides one of the teasing keys to *Shira*. Böcklin had a pronounced preference for mythological and allegorical topics, often rendered with a sharp realism of detail, and in pursuing this interest he repeatedly devoted emphatic attention to those figures of classical mythology associated with a riot of sensuality–Pan, satyrs, centaurs, Triton disporting himself with a Nereid. He also produced two versions of an allegorical painting that is particularly pertinent to the central thematic complex of *Shira*: entitled *Poetry and Painting*, it shows two female figures on either side of a fountain (presumably, the Pierian Spring), Poetry on the left, naked to the waist, leaning on the fountain's edge; Painting on the right, enveloped in drapery, dipping one hand into the water while with the other she holds a palette. Interestingly, Böcklin never did a painting of a skull, if one can trust the testimony of the comprehensive illustrated catalogue of his paintings published in Berne in 1977. He was, however, much preoccupied with death, which he characteristically represented in a histrionic mode that has a strong affinity with Symbolist painting. One scene he painted a few times was *The Island of Death*, in which the island looms as a spooky vertical mass against a dark background, with a small boat approaching it in the foreground, rowed by a presumably male figure, his back to us,while a female figure stands erect in the boat. One of his last paintings, *The Plague* (1989), exhibits a more brutally direct relevance to *Shira*: a hideous female figure, with three large wings and grotesque tail, yet more woman than monster, swoops down over the streets of a town.

The reproduction that hangs on Shira's wall is probably of *Self-Portrait with Death as Fiddler* (1872). It is possible that Agnon simply forgot the self-portrait and concentrated on the skull when he introduced the painting into his novel, but given his frequently calculating coyness as a writer, it seems more likely that he deliberately suppressed the entire foreground of the canvas. In the foreground, Böcklin, wearing an elegant dark smock, stands with palette in one hand and brush in the other, his trim beard delicately modeled by a source of light from the upper left, his lively lucid eyes intent on the canvas he is painting. Behind him, in the upper right quadrant of the painting, virtually leaning on the painter's back, death as a leering skull with bony hand–rendered in the same precise detail as the figure of the artist–scrapes away on his fiddle. That missing artist absorbed in his work who stands in front of the figure of death is in one respect what *Shira* is all about.

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Death is, I think, a specter of many faces in this somber, troubling novel. It has, to begin with, certain specific historical resonances for the period of the late 1930s in which the action is set. In the two decades since 1914, death had given ample evidence of having been instated as the regnant Zeitgeist of the century. Herbst recalls wading up to his knees in blood as a soldier in the great senseless slaughter that was the First World War. The novel begins with mention of a young man murdered by Arabs, and in these days of organized terrorist assaults and random violence against the Jews of Palestine that began in 1936, there is a repeated drumbeat of killings in the background of the main action. On the European horizon, German Jews are desperately trying to escape, many of them sensing that Germany is about to turn into a vast death-trap. But beyond Agnon's ultimately political concern with the historical moment as a time of endemic murder, he is also gripped by the timeless allegory of Böcklin's painting: every artist, in every age, as an ineluctable given of his mortal condition, works with death fiddling at his back, and cannot create any art meaningfully anchored in the human condition unless he makes the potency of death part of it, at once breathing life into the inanimate and incorporating death in his living creation. Agnon was nearing sixty when he began work on the novel and an octogenarian when he made his last concerted effort to finish it, and it is easy enough to imagine that he saw himself in Böcklin's attitude as a self-portraitist, the grim fiddler just behind him.

Herbst takes due notice of the Böcklin painting in Shira's apartment, and he is several times bothered by an oddly literal question about it. "This skull that Böcklin painted, did he paint it from a model or through the power of his imagination? Why do I ask? Herbst wondered about himself" (I:29).Why, indeed, should so sophisticated an intellectual trouble himself about whether the painter used a model or not? The question, it should be observed, makes somewhat better sense if one keeps in mind not just the skull but both figures in *Self-Portrait with Death as Fiddler*, for then, since Böcklin demonstrably used himself as the model for the painter, one might begin to speculate about the "source" for the macabre fiddler standing behind the painter, the very hybrid nature of the composition putting to the test any simple mimetic conception of art. A couple of paragraphs later in the same chapter, a clue, or at least a dangling possibility of connection, is provided for Herbst's question. Again he asks himself whether Böcklin worked from a model or from his imagination, but this time he decides firmly on the latter alternative when he recalls that Böcklin "used to complain that he wasn't able to paint a woman from a live model because his Italian wife's relentless jealously prevented him from bringing any woman into his studio." There is an instructive overlap, then, between painting *eros* and painting *thanatos* from

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the imagination rather than from a model. The particular link is important enough for Herbst to pick it up again explicitly in a dream somewhat later in the novel (II:7). In the dream he accompanies his daughter Tamara to Greece,where she means to undertake a study of verse meters (the word *shira* is used here for poetry). The father is glad to have gone with his daughter on the trip, "for otherwise she would have seen him strolling with Shira, and it wouldn't have been seemly, as Henrietta had conspired with the wife of a certain teacher from Beit Hakerem not to allow their husbands to bring any strange women into their studios, and if they wanted to paint–they could paint a death's-head." One notes that Böcklin's allegorical pair *Dichtung und Malerei,* Poetry and Painting, follow in quick sequence in the dream.

Agnon gives one further twist to the Böcklin painting by turning it at one point into a kind of reverse portrait of Dorian Gray: as Shira visibly deteriorates, the painting deteriorates with her and so its artificial deathliness becomes progressively more lifelike: "The picture became so darkened that it would frighten you, as though a real skull were staring at you" (II:2). Agnon never entirely renounced the macabre interests of his early neo-Gothicism, and though here the ghastly correspondence between painter and owner is given a perfectly plausible explanation–as Shira neglects herself, she neglects her possessions and no longer bothers to dust the painting–troubling thoughts are stirred about the status in reality of the art-work. Its origins, or at least the origins of the part of the Bocklin painting mentioned in the novel, are not in the representation of a model but in the artist's imagination, and yet the unforeseen intercourse between painting and experience produces a spectral affinity between the two, imbuing the art work with an air of reality the artist himself had not given it.

Let us try to pull these strands together and consider the kind of conclusion to which Agnon wanted them to lead. Shira, hard-bitten, mannish, unseductive, coldly imperious, neither young nor pretty, seems an unlikely candidate either for the focus of an erotic obsession or for the symbolic representation of Poetry. It seems to me, however, that all these unappetizing traits are precisely what makes her the perfect conduit to carry Herbst from the realm of scholarship to the realm of poetry. Agnon's figure for Poetry is no classical maiden in decorous *dèshabille*. Art as he conceives it is a violation of all the conventional expectations of bourgeois rationality. In Freudian terms, the roots of art are in the premoral realm of polymorphous perversity. It is hard to reconcile anything in the character of Shira with ordinary notions of the good and the beautiful, and once Herbst has learned something about her bizarre sexual history, the initial ambiguity of identity between female and male that he perceives in her is compounded by others in his fantasies: Shira is both the rapist and the raped, the wielder of terrible

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weapons and the dismembered female victim, the nurturer of mothers and infants and the asocial disrupter of families, nurse and source of contagion. Sexually, she clearly appeals to Herbst because she is everything that his faded-blonde, maternal, sweetly solicitous wife is not, and in the thematic logic of the novel, it is necessary that he be detached from the complacencies of the haven of domesticity in order to be inducted into the soul-trying realm of poetry. The novel stresses the indissoluble bond between poetry and *eros* because in Agnon's view what art does is to give the revelatory coherence of form to erotic energies (the affinity with both Nietzsche and Freud is not accidental), and, conversely, the many-faced spirit of *eros,* both god and monster, is the very motor-force of art. It is instructive that Agnon's major fiction before *Shira* repeatedly focuses on some form of the gravely impaired male sexuality (*A Simple Story*, *Just Yesterday*, novellas like *The Hill of Sand* and *Betrothed*); only in this novel is there emotionally affecting consummation–"Flesh like your flesh will never be forgotten"–however elusive the object of desire subsequently proves to be.

But the most crucial crossing of opposites associated with Shira is the wedding of health and sickness, love and death. At the beginning, the freckle-like protuberances on Shira's cheeks seem to be merely a token of her mannish unattractiveness; eventually, we realize that they were an early sign of her leprosy, and so the death's-head on her wall becomes an emblem of the fate to which she is consigned, in which Herbst will finally join her. It is reasonable to assume that Agnon, who made a careful study of Freud in the 1930s and probably read him episodically earlier during his sojourn in Germany, followed Freud in positing *eros* and *thanatos* as the two universal driving forces of the psyche. A couple of the passages we have glanced at establish an eerie equivalence between the two. If Böcklin, Herbst reasons, was obliged to use only the power of his imagination for the female figures he painted, the same must be true for his painting of the skull. And if Herbst in his dream, constrained like Böcklin by his wife's jealousy, is denied access to female models, he is invited to substitute bony death for woman's flesh as the subject of his art. In the end, no model is required for either because love and death are so deeply seated in every one of us, constituting the matrix of all our human imaginings.

A small point in Agnon's Hebrew makes the force of his ramified use of painting particularly clear. The standard Hebrew verb "to paint," *tzayer*, is also the verb Agnon uses for "to imagine." A chief reason for Herbst's failure to write his tragedy is that he is too fastidious to imagine, or literally "paint to himself," the concrete suffering of the leper who figures centrally in its plot. "For Herbst was afraid to immerse his mind in that disease and to ponder it, for example, to imagine the appearance of the leprosy in its differ-

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ent colors, or how lepers behave toward each other and what their sexual practices are" (II:17). The true artist is the person, like Rembrandt of *The Anatomy Lesson*, like the anonymous painter of the school of Breughel, and like Böcklin, who looks on death and disease clear-eyed and unflinching, just as we see the face of Böcklin in his self-portrait serenely scrutinizing his canvas.

If the artist's credo put forth by *Shira* is in one respect distinctly modernist, embracing the idea of art as an unflinching "technique of trouble," in R. P. Blackmur's phrase, it also has an oddly medieval feeling. Herbst is an historian of Byzantium versed in the ascetic practices of the early Christians, and the novel draws explicit parallels between the monastic renunciation of worldly life and the withdrawal to the leper hospital that Herbst will choose as his final fulfillment. In some of his earlier fiction, Agnon had set up a simple alternative between art and *eros,* depicting protagonists who renounce the gratification of desire in the name of the pursuit of art. Here, on the other hand, desire joins hands with art in the magic circle of imminent death, removed from the shallow egotism and the complacent self-deceptions of everyday social existence. This is chiefly what I had in mind earlier when I proposed that in *Shira* Agnon seeks to move through realism to allegory. And this, I suspect, was precisely the problem that bedeviled him for nearly two decades after the initial élan that produced Books One and Two. How was he to take Herbst, a figure with a certain academic pedigree, a family history, individual work habits and domestic tics, and translate him into the symbolic sphere where poetry, desire, and death were one; and what face could Shira, hitherto also a novelistic character with an individual sensibility and a personal history, show in that ultimate locus of thematic convergences, withdrawn from the worldly realm?

There is a structural analogy, though I am not proposing any influence, between the ending of *Shira* and the ending of Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma.* Stendhal, too, sought to transport a hero entrammeled in the petty machinations of worldly life to a privileged sphere of lofty withdrawal from the world, and though his novel never actually breaks off like Agnon's, most critics have felt that the conclusion of this masterpiece of European fiction is huddled, leaping too suddenly from all the complications of the court of Parma to the contemplativeness of the monastery at the very end. Herbst's planned route to the monastic leprosarium is persuasively traced by Adiel Amzeh, the protagonist of the remarkable story, "Forevermore," which Agnon originally wrote to include in *Shira* and then decided to publish separately. In the fuller dimensions of the novel, he was unable to find a solid fictional bridge on which Manfred Herbst could cross over from his home and wife and children and academic tasks to that ghastly consecrated realm where a disease-ridden

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woman whose name means Poetry could offer him more than the world ever could. The result was a plot in which after a certain point the central character can only turn again and again in the circuits of his one obsession, circling back on the apartment where Shira is no longer to be found, revolving in his mind the idea of the tragedy he would write and the memory of the flesh that cannot be forgotten, which are but obverse sides of the same lost coin.

There are certain works of literature that are finally stymied by the bold effort of the writer to pursue a personal vision beyond the limits of precedent and genre. Stendhal's *Charterhouse* is a memorably case in point; another, still closer to *Shira* in it actual incompletion, is Kafka's *The Castle*. Confronted with this order of originality, most readers, I think, will be content with the splendid torso, however much they may regret the absence of the fully sculpted figure. In *Shira* the hero's final way to the place of poetry and truth, where death hones desire, is indicated rather than fictionally imagined. But Herbst's descent into an underworld of *eros* and art, enacted against the background of Jerusalem life in the gathering shadows of a historical cataclysm of inconceivable proportions, is so brilliantly rendered that *Shira*, even without an ending, deserves a place among the major modern novels.

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Herbert Gold

SELFISH LIKE ME

While I was thinking about writing this chronicle, it happened that I spent a weekend at a quiet retreat in northern California. At the outdoor swimming pool, which is fed by hot springs and situated with stringent beauty atop a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the custom is nudity. It's almost a rule. Nudity keeps the microbes down–no fermenting man-made materials in the pool. It also serves well for overall sunning.

As I stripped off my clothes, I noticed a pensive woman looking out over the sea. She was very attractive, she had no book by her side, she was just concentrating on her thoughts. I swam, and then I found myself–perhaps it was no accident–sitting on my towel near her. The nudity of strangers provokes unspoken rules of discretion and sobriety. Privacy is respected. Nevertheless, we began to talk.

She was a German psychoanalysis, visiting California to attend a conference. When we introduced ourselves by name, she remembered the German translation of my book, *Fathers*. She began to speak of her own father, whom she lacked, whom she never knew. He committed suicide a few months before she was born. It happened during the last days of the war, he was a general, and she still didn't know why he killed himself. "Perhaps it was because he saw Auschwitz, she said. I said nothing. "Perhaps he had been given orders to fight on and he knew it was useless, just to do more killing." I said nothing. "Perhaps he was afraid of the Russians."

I nodded. That could have been the case.

She burst out: "Maybe he was only sad that we lost the war?"

We sat in silence for awhile. I found her attractive and the situation was peculiar. I didn't try to console her for this event, raw for her still, which occurred more than forty years ago. I didn't ask if he was a Wehrmacht general or in some other service, such as the S. S. I moved my towel to cover my circumcised penis, and then thought, What a foolish expression of embarrassment. Her nudity was without other gesture of meaning–it was just what it was. And then I decided: But it would also be embarrassing and obvious to remove the towel now that I'd covered myself.

Then I thought about what it must be like for a child to come into the world with no father, no brother or sister, and to learn she is the last of a

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Editor's Note: This essay was commissioned for *Testimony: Contemporary Writers Make the Holocaust Personal*, edited by David Rosenberg, to be published in November 1989 by Times Books, a division of Random House.

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line; and to know she lost her father in this way–he chose to abandon her. He may have loved her or, lost in his own chaos, he may have given her no thought at all. And of course, this confusion explained why she went into the cure of souls business. As most doctors do, she sought to cure herself. What can have been the life of such a person–intelligent, pretty, fatherless, first in the defeated and bereft Germany of her childhood and then in the triumphant one of its present prosperity? I was thinking about the miracle of metabolism which doesn't mark such a person with smudges and scars, but allowed her to be long, lanky, athletic, healthy-looking, with fine eyes. Well, perhaps the mark of grief was that pensiveness, and in this case the loss had only made her more attractive. I was still thinking about my stupid towel. And I wondered what my book about the history of an American Jew meant to her, but of course I wouldn't ask for anything more than the shy acknowledgment she had already given me. "Do you know any Jews in Germany?" I asked.

I managed to let the towel fall away.

"There aren't any! They're gone! We killed them all!" Suddenly, at this point in our conversation, after the calm recitation with which she had begun, her words seemed to come out of her mouth as a cry.

"But there are still some in Germany," I said.

"I met a Jew who lives two hundred kilometers away! I never see him! We lost all our Jews!"

There was a time of silence. We listened to the Pacific Ocean rolling up against the cliff, listened to the children playing in the pool as they called out to each other, splashing and laughing. We paid attention to the lovely bee-humming summer afternoon. "You're a scholar," I said. "It should be easy to find some of your father's fellow-officers, there must be some of them still alive, and ask what could have been in his mind. . . ."

We had found an odd rhythm. Someone spoke, there were silences between our sentences, and then a reply finally emerged. But this time the question was different. She didn't answer. I went on: "You could ask his fellow officers, couldn't you?"

She waited and waited. We sat in a version of the yoga position, cross-legged and naked facing each other, and then she said: "I don't want to know. That's the whole trouble. I still don't want to know."

Sitting there naked with the German general's beautiful daughter is an exaggeration of the condition of American Jews–and of its extreme manifestation in an American Jewish writer's precarious comfort amid the astonishing natural bounty of northern California. How can a person come all this way and so quickly from an egg-dealer grandfather in Kamenetz-Pomolsk to a hatcher of stories in San Francisco? Rhetorical questions are for

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editorials. I prefer to recount: I've come here and it's amazing.

Surely some young men have larger feelings than I had. I was a soldier during the war, 1943-1946, and glamorized to myself by weapons, military intelligence training, risk. I heard of horrors; perhaps I even believed in them. What I really believed in was my own needs. At eighteen when I entered, I was thrilled by the luck of finding a good war, benefiting from pure hatreds; history did me this favor. I was looking for girls, comrades, fun. I imagined heroism for myself; I sought hazard as a means to waking up. Please make me a fighter pilot like my college friend Marty Rosenberg (shot down, killed on the ground because he was a Jew); please make me a paratrooper–I've got good ankles, like to jump–which they promised to do, once I learned Russian. I could jump with our gallant Soviet allies.

Since I was immortal, I feared nothing but boredom or deprivation. Danger, even discomfort was a kick to the metabolism. The suffering of others left me somewhat astonished.

Other young men are different, maybe more generous. This is how I was. Later, I've admitted to my children that at first I felt no joy about the idea of becoming a father; it seemed to be a distant and irrelevant form of immortality; I let it happen because somebody nearby seemed to want it. Who said I needed this help toward living forever? I could manage by myself.

My daughters taught me to love my daughters. My sons taught me to love my sons. The love of children is a common human experience, but this one had to learn it from his kids. It seemed that I had to experience events before I could value them.

If no one in my family had happened to survive in Europe, I might not have missed that family. But two did, one of them a French doctor, Alain Waynberger, gone to Paris as a boy from Eastern Europe when most of the relatives chose America. He liked the idea of dozens of varieties of cheese, he said; also French painting, French girls, the nervous language. He became a French doctor, served in the French army. When France collapsed, he was one of the few who found his way across the Swiss border, paying for the chocolate he was offered by official Swiss police hospitality. "Paid enough for many cups of chocolate–for chocolate, a watch, and a cuckoo clock." He was able to bring his wife and their child.

When the war was over, he found no surviving relatives in Europe. His wife had no surviving relatives. They had their son. And so when the G. I. Bill, Fulbright scholar cousin appeared from Ohio, during those days of rationing, no heat, black market, I became instantly family, to be fed, entertained and fathered by a man who had lost almost everyone. The trials of *les collabos* filled the newspapers. What did he do, was what you asked

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about any new acquaintance.

My cousin still loved French wine and cheese. When I refused cognac at dinner, he looked shocked. "Zut, if you don't want to drink it, I must give it to you by injection."

He made me laugh and he also told me what he knew about how our relatives died. Because I loved him and he was loving, this had meaning. It was real because I found a survivor. I could grieve for the imagined deaths.

I met other survivors, the people who sold fruit in the market on the corner, with their tattoos on their wrists. Because I saw the tattoos, it was real. Despite my swagger of a young man who had merely found a pretty girl, in due course I was being instructed by an infant in the unsimple and unpredictable turmoils and stillnesses of love. I was beginning to see what lay around me. I felt the need of replenishment; I felt the replenishment my first daughter gave me. Smelling clean and laughing after her bath, she made the news of the world more than an entertainment, like a movie–we were in it now together.

A stubbed toe–or a caressed arm–can easily obscure the rest of history. Through the fog of youth, when a person feels his own hungers most clearly, I began to notice that something unusual had happened.

My few lonely cousins, surviving and remembering, taught me what to treasure, what was lost.

***

My life as a Jew has been eccentric and not abnormal for the times. I grew up in a non-Jewish town, a western suburb of Cleveland where there were no Jews. The combination of the long streetcar ride into Cleveland and a rabbi who stood his belly too close and hectored a boy who asked questions made me defiant. Probably my questions were foolish and inciting. But I sincerely wanted to know why the devil I was there. I preferred to play baseball on Sunday mornings. It was said that the only separation between the Euclid Avenue Temple and the Unitarian church across the street was Euclid Avenue.

When bar mitzvah time came, I wasn't. I said no. Preoccupied with becoming Americans in a difficult isolation, with making a living in a depression, my parents didn't need more fights with a willful son. I'm still astonished that I won (lost) this small family war.

Nevertheless, I was made to know I really was Jewish. An open herring can, with a note attached to it, broke through the window when I lay in bed with chicken pox. The herring smell reflected a touch of neighborly

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imagination. The woman next door forbade her son to play with me. Later he brought my brother and me upstairs, his mother not yet home, and wanted to "wrestle" with us. He was bigger, he was a couple of years older, he knew things we didn't know yet. When a sudden smell of punk occurred, a bitterness in the air, like fireworks, or like sour herring, I realized that something strange was happening, grabbed my younger brother, and escaped. My brother and I never told anyone about this incident. We sensed confusion in the matter for both Jack and Jack's mother. We learned about sex later–what little we learned.

The police came regularly to our house to say there was a report of loud talking. "Who, officer?" my father asked.

"Maybe it wasn't talking, maybe it's running the lawn mower on Sunday?"

"This is Friday," my father said.

The cop looked around, grinning; shrugged; went away. We could see Jack's mother stationed behind her curtains.

As I reached adolescence, I was no longer invited to birthday parties. The same girls offered interesting and secret invitations. I was kissed and pressed against the walls of homes I could not enter. In due course we studied these matters together without any discussion–Donna and Pattie and Maggie, a trembling wild creature whom I wanted to take to a dance but couldn't. Her parents wouldn't permit it. But silent and greedily we could share, after school, our books spilling from our arms, the smell of dead leaves and punk rising about us in the mid-Western autumn.

The equation in those days was: Sex is the devil's work; the Jew is the devil; therefore, if you want sex, you have to go to the devil. At Lakewood High School, curious anatomists wondered if I had a hidden tail. Maggie asked me to carry her books home again, then asked to see my foot. Did I have five toes or only two?

I made friends among the other loners and oddballs. There were the early drinkers, the ones who wrote poetry, despised their parents, had secrets–those in the fighting crisis of adolescence. There weren't so many of them in those times. My parents and name had handed me a ticket of admission. I decided it wasn't really a disadvantage to be a Jew. I still didn't know what it was, however.

My father, who owned a food market, carried a ball peen hammer in his back pocket. I loved to see the silvery forked glint sticking out of his pants. It was for opening fruit crates and hitting his enemies.

The Black Legion, out of Jackson, Michigan, and William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirts, out of Lake Paranoia, America, and the German-American Bund were popular allegiances. Bundles of their newspapers were

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thrown against front doors of Emerson Junior and Lakewood High School. In the samples left in my locker, in case I had missed them, I found cartoons of hook-nosed exploiters. I learned that President "Rosenfeld" was a member of the Tribe, along with a diverse crew which included Jack Benny, Judas, and a strange creature called Lilith who stole the strength of men's loins while they slept. Of these, the only one I knew personally was Lilith.

An exchange program between German and American schools returned a classmate who spoke to an assembly about his year in Heidelberg: "I didn't see any Jew persecution. But I didn't have to see any Jews, either."

There was laughter and people turned around to look at me.

The principal of the school, when he finished, thanked the boy for reporting so well on a broadening experience which contributed to bring about better understanding of a nation which was often unjustly attacked in the controlled American press.

I suppose I had two choices in dealing with all this. One was the reaction I met later: The Jews who crossed Euclid Avenue to become Unitarian, changed their names, hid from the storm. The other was defiance. I wanted to discover the meaning of this secret power with which I was credited and blamed for. I realized it was more than the bellying rabbi had explained, more than the fights about "Christ-killer," the herring can through the window, the sweating boy next door, the girls greedy in the afternoon after school, the mysteries of being different in a different way from my friends among the other oddballs of Lakewood High School.

It was a rickety matter to decide it merely wasn't a disadvantage to be a Jew. That wasn't enough. I found something as unreal and fantastic as a travelling carnival in the fights with boys I didn't even know, the kisses from girls who wouldn't let me come to their parties. Too many negative enticements around here. Yet I liked my friends. I liked the kisses, too. Perhaps the name "Gold," my father and mother speaking with their accents–nobody else in Lakewood seemed to have an accent–came together to make a disadvantage which I liked.

There was a third option which I wasn't yet ready to discover. It was in the air I breathed, the life I lived at those ages, in that time and place. It would have been to make a life as a Jew on grounds more solid than exotic defiance.

I found a book to love even more than I adored the books of Thomas Wolf. "Oh lost and by the wind-grieved ghost, return." (Lovable stuff for a seventeen-year-old) and James Branch Cabell (elegant fencing among undefined yearnings in cloud-cuckoo land, or maybe Virginia). The book was a collaborative series of novels by Paul Eldredge, a professor of French at

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New York University, and George Sylvester Viereck, a German propagandist through several wars, who claimed to be the illegitimate son of the Kaiser and was imprisoned for Nazi activities during World War II. These were an eccentric choice for a seventeen-year-old's favorite literature. George Sylvester Viereck's masterwork, *My First Two Thousand Years*, was the story of the wandering Jew, romantic, awed, hyperheated, crediting me with miracles. I took it personally. As a mid-Western adolescent, I liked the idea of that special Jewish talent, "the secret of infinite pleasure indefinitely prolonged."

The sequels didn't live up to the first book; sequels seldom do. Later, after the war, after his release from prison, I lived on the same slum block of Manhattan with Mr. Viereck, and used to see the senile old man stumbling past my ground-floor apartment. And then, at the age of forty, after a second marriage and new children, I wrote a book, a memoir and essay about how I grew into being both a Jew and a writer, and called it "My Last Two Thousand Years." The old Nazi was one of the featured players in my story. I was still inventing myself as a Jew out of unpromising materials. Every writer needs to be the hero of his own myth, no matter how unheroic the raw material. "I'm writing an autobiography" the writer says, and his friend answers: "I hope you find a subject worthy of it.")

***

The war was over and I was demobilized after three years in the Army. I was twenty-one, but in the ways that matter for peacetime, the clock had stopped and I was still eighteen. I was ready to start education again, start courting and flirting again, start a more real life than stripping and firing weapons, jumping from parachute towers, interpreting for Russian prisoners who had chosen to fight on the German side. The Army had trained me as a Russian expert, and along with these skills came the notion of our-gallant-Soviet-allies as one long smiling block of word (Siege of Leningrad, haunting flights of geese, meadowlands). The lost souls of General Vlasov's volunteers puzzled me.

I was a bookish child, bookishly puzzled, and ready to catch up with the serious business I had missed. My first summer out of the Army was devoted to loafing, tennis, chasing girls, and reading Proust; an uncle bought me six ties to welcome me home. Meanwhile, my parents heard from a distant Polish cousin who had managed to survive. They filled out forms, wrote affidavits, sent money. He arrived in Shaker Heights.

He had been an eye surgeon on the staff of hospitals in Warsaw,

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Berlin, and Paris. Alone of our family in Poland, he came through the events because he was assimilated to Polish life, blue-eyed, without close family attachments to hinder him, and he passed through the German occupation as a Polish bricklayer. When he was finally sent to a camp, he was sent as a Pole, not a Jew. He was called Henry. He was betrayed only near the end. He lived.

When he arrived in America, he wanted to be a doctor again. He studied, took exams, and failed the English part of it. Okay, he studied some more. In late middle age he was going to learn enough English to be a doctor in America. He thought he would be an eye surgeon again.

In the mysterious isolation in which a world like the suburbs of Cleveland envelopes itself, a scheme developed among several families. A neighbor also had a relative, a survivor, a woman who had suffered, lost her loved ones, and lived. What a sweet idea to put these two together, make a match! Okay, they weren't young, but it's never too late.

Better not let them in on the plan. They were both shy; who knew how nervous some people get? Absolutely better not to warn them. This was grown-up business. After all they had gone through, they were like children, timid kids. They were dependents now–we had to consider this. "You will come to tea with some friends," my mother told Henry.

Obediently, like a good child, he assented.

We arrived at the house of the neighbor. In his courtly way, Henry bowed and touched the hand of our hostess. And then she introduced Henry's fellow survivor. He stared, and then he spat on her.

I didn't ask for the details and he never offered them. It was enough that he had known her in the camp. I had read what it meant to be a Kapo, and in the widening horrified pale blue eyes of my cousin, I caught a glimpse–not enough–of what it was to be a victim. I couldn't see the expression in the woman's face because I was ashamed to look.

There was consternation in the little group of neighbors and friends. They thought the war had ended with minor changes, mostly conciliatory–now Russian Jews were admitted to the country club which previously was limited to German Jews. I don't know what they learned from their consternation except maybe not to set out matchmaking as if the rest of the world was Shaker Heights, Ohio.

For the few months more that I knew Henry he seemed silent and withdrawn, oddly smooth-faced with the weight he had gained suddenly. He passed the state medical language exams and was licensed to practice medicine, went to work in a hospital, and almost immediately suffered a stroke and died. He is remembered now more for that act of spitting on a fellow Jew than for anything else. Those who might have remembered him

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in Poland, of course, were gone before we met him.

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In 1949, when I arrived as a student in Paris, everything was magic, and the magic was all mixed up: the ancient rusted bicycle I bought with the shrewd idea that it needed no lock because no one would bother to steal it; my wife hiding under an umbrella in a corner of our room because I was trying to give myself a shower by splashing water from the sink; the thrills of rationing and the black market, so that we could trade our American clothes for the luxuries of theater tickets; my French tutor who first called me "mon vieu" and caused a blush of pride, a heat I can still feel in memory; reading Sartre's essay on how to treat the German occcupant in various hypothetical situations (give him a light for his cigarette if he asks, because he's a human being and it would be degrading not to; talk to him when he asks a direction, because he's the enemy and he is performing as the occupant); the birds twittering in the courtyard of the little Hotel de l'Univers on the rue Notre Dame de Lorette and the smell of the breath of the hotel manager, which I thought was tooth rot but finally learned was only garlic, a substance I had not grown up with in Ohio.

And my fellow students who invited me to dinner at their apartment and then pulled out their yellow stars.

And the woman who sold us cheese at the corner shop with the numbers tattooed on her wrist.

And then the jovial French tutor, who fondly said "mon vieux" told me he had been a member of the Petainist Blue Shirt youth brigade. He invited me to hear a recording, in secret, up a stairway of the rue Mouffetard, along with his fellow veterans, with candles burning in front of each of us, of a screeching speech by the revered Marechal.

The events of the war were still the day's news and the day's life. They were not yet history, and perhaps, if one attends closely to the world, they are not merely history now, either.

In my twenties, I was still immortal as far as I was concerned. Any other solution besides eternal life didn't fit into my plans. Death was a rumor that didn't apply. Yet it gradually came to dawn on me that the same wasn't the case for others.

In Paris in 1949, I met a man with an odd disease. He looked like one of those freak wrestlers, Man Mountain Moise, with a granite jaw, protruding nose, stone ears; all the cartilage was growing and solidifying. He had no hair, eyebrows, or lashes. His tongue was enormous. It impaired his speech

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and, I was told, he would die choked by his own organs.

With thick sounds he tried to tell me about his life in French, in Yiddish, which was a bewilderment to me, in English. He had been a prisoner. There had been experiments, meshuganehs, making meshuganeh experiments with knives, no anaesthetics, and he was one who lived. God alone could understand. Even God couldn't understand.

He wanted it to be known. He thought it could be written down.

I listened, but mostly I watched, astonished by the physical process of his trying to get words past his tongue. It was a stumbling breathless procedure. His head looked as if it were carved out of a block of encrusted bone.

The condition is called *Acromegaly*. Couldn't something be done for him? No, they said. Perhaps his story could be told; perhaps someone could be found to tell it. But nothing could be done for his body. He was the result of a doctor's sport and imagination, and there were no doctors to undo those games.

There is a story about Claire Booth Luce complaining that she was bored with hearing about the Holocaust. A Jewish friend of hers said he perfectly understood her sensitivity in the matter; in fact, he had the same sense of repetitiveness and fatigue, hearing so often about the Crucifixion.

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A few years ago I was put on the mailing list of a Holocaust revisionist mystic in Los Angeles. In a long xeroxed letter ("copies to Opinion Leaders"), he described driving up one of the barren mountains looking out over the sprawling city, studying the lights below, realizing that many of those lights represented Jewish houses and businesses, and suddenly being struck by an insight which he found overwhelming. He was out of a job, and there were so many Jews out there, living, working, breeding! If there really had been a Holocaust, why were they there?

He knew, he explained in a series of bulletins, that this revelation would make difficulties in his life, especially since now he was called by duty to devote all his energies to the cause of the truth he had discovered one sleepless night on a mountaintop overlooking a city crammed with Jews. But the Truth demanded to be told. Tom Paine and Benjamin Franklin would understand. And he had found a little contemporary circle of colleagues, others who in different fashions had come to knowledge. They would carry the battle to the enemy and the misled sheep of America.

Okay, he's crazy, he's paranoid, absurd. But also he had comrades in

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his struggle. He has fellow logicians. If Hitler with all his discipline was such a big deal, why do the Jews still take our jobs, our women, make our movies, decide what we'll see on the tube–tell us what to think? If the Jews were destroyed, why are they still so much with us? It makes their power even more oppressive. It means even extermination can't help. Like the devil, the Jew survives his death.

In this madness there is a certain truth. Judaism revived, Israel happened, a world and a history were lost but something both new and old came into the hollow place.

As the years go by, the story disseminates into myth and politics. The nation of Israel disturbs the world's comfort. These years, some feel like Claire Booth Luce, weary of the matter; some come to a more efficient form of denial. I learned from a personal friend about the power of that peculiar form of philosophy, Holocaust Revisionism, and its appeal to the sophisticated and well-meaning. At a dinner party in San Francisco, a lady turned to the Jew at her right with a question which troubled her. "Herb, have you heard? It seems the so-called Holy Coast of the Jews during World War Two, you remember, is just a propaganda. I was talking to a professor from L. A. the other day, he's a real expert and he made a study, he told me a lot of books prove. . . ."

My fork, lifting asparagus, paused as she chattered on. "The Zionists made it all up, you see, to get people upset and then they could do what they wanted. . . ."

This woman is university-educated, energetic, devoted to the arts. She was the wife of a colleague. During our twenty-five years of sociability, I've seen her give energy and money to a succession of causes: young playwrights, blacks, the environment, health foods. There was no ill-will or spite in her announcement between the soup and the fish that the murder of the six million did not take place. There was curiosity. There was the never-ceasing need for dinnertime conversation. There was a pleasure in discovery and the sincere wish that I might share her joy. "Now I understand something, Herb. I wondered why so many of my friends are Jews, I mean if they were supposed to be all killed by the Nazis. I didn't stop to realize, Herb. . . ."

Normally, I am impatient, impolite, and abrupt. In this case, perhaps because of the occasion and because I have known the lady so long, I merely mumbled that I preferred to discuss the subject when we could speak privately.

Charlotte is a perfectly decent young woman in the mode which keeps the average prosperous American world in order. She pays some attention to her children; she enjoys serving soup and salad to her friends; she grieves

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when she quarrels with her husband. If you prick her, she bleeds; she asks you politely not to do that again. She doesn't need to be deeply emotional or profoundly intelligent for these events to occur. She is a person who seeks style and comfort. For Charlotte, it's more comfortable not to be troubled and to accept the drift of sentiment away from the once-delicious images of Paul Newman in *Exodus*. The Charlottes go along on whatever trip happens to be offered by fashion. There were now new scenarios.

I didn't mind playing tennis with the wife of a friend, no matter that her spirit was not saintly. Mostly mine isn't, either.

How Charlotte puzzles me is that her decently callous, ordinarily selfish life is what we can expect of human beings everywhere. She was ready to find something appealing in the madness of denial because it supported her average prosperous expectations in life. The Jews have brought around enough trouble already–no offense meant, of course.

She sailed on with bright good humor. "I realize this isn't the greatest dinner conversation for you, being a loyal Jewish person and all, Herb, but when you consider what a raw deal the Arabs are getting as a result of faked photographs and exaggerations and blackmail, Herb. . . ."

It happened that I had heard of a showing of the French film, *Night and Fog*, a documentary of the concentration camps. We don't need to rehearse this story now: the living skeletons staring at the camera or stacked like cordwood, the dying, the trembling heaped bodies; the shovels and tractors pushing flesh into manageable heaps; the captured German footage and still photographs. I telephoned Charlotte and said, "We have a date."

"That's terrific" she said. "Just because I'm a married woman is no reason I can't have a night out with an old friend."

We did it very formally, with no discussion of the movie beforehand. A little supper, no wine, a cappuccino; I wanted to keep her alert. During the film she was silent. When it was over, tears were running down her cheeks. She hunched her shoulders, pulling her coat around her face as we hurried to my automobile. I took her home directly. She was still crying.

A few months later, at a dinner sponsored by the English-speaking Union, I happened to sit near Charlotte. The driftings of social life had arranged things so that I had seen little of her. She looked at me and a light of greeting came into her face. "You're just back from Israel, Herb! Tell me, what's the real situation from the inside? I hear–well, I guess they're trying to brainwash us. . . Say, have you heard about how all that propaganda about the murdering of Jews during the war is just that–Zionist propaganda? Now I don't blame individual loyal Jewish persons like yourself, but. . . . "

This time I was less cautious; no asparagus on my fork. "Charlotte! Don't you remember that film we saw together?"

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She looked at me with friendly, interested, concerned, blinking confusion. "What film, Herb?"

"*Nuit et Bruillard.* We saw it together."

"That means 'Evening Mist?' in French, doesn't it? I don't remember that film. Who directed it, who was the *metteur-en-scène*?"

"You don't remember, Charlotte?"

She was puzzled. She leaned toward me with her intense pale blue eyes. She looked into my eyes with absolute honesty. "I go to a lot of screenings, Herb, but I try to keep my mind clear and only remember the good ones. I saw a darling Swiss-French film, *Claire's Knee*, or something, is that the one? I mean, whatever's right, but if I went to a movie with you, Herb, surely I would remember, wouldn't I?"

Charlotte doesn't have to be like the man who wrote that he had driven to a height overlooking the grand city of Los Angeles and sat there all night with his revelation: Los Angeles is full of Jews; the Holocaust couldn't have happened. Charlotte needs no revelation. She prefers adjustment. There is too much to deal with and we have to make our comfort as we can. In the economy that makes her moral metabolism go, all she requires is the cut-off, the amnesia of convenience, working for her as efficiently as the tools of her beauty and money.

In Russian, there is a verb which means to-perform-the-act-of-falling-silent. The verb is active–a positive withdrawal. It's the last phrase in Pushkin's play, *Boris Goudonov*, a stage direction as the crowd shrinks from its awful feeling. The choice is forced, but it suits the crowd's needs. Charlotte, not pressed in the same way, nevertheless has learned the human talent of performing the act of convenient forgetfulness. Those of us who have children have seen that this is a natural human talent. On the subject of the Jews, there is plenty of incentive to practice the skill of making things run right along.

Even Jews have difficulty imagining their history and matching their lives to it. A few years ago a homosexual friend, an activist in gay causes, normally sensible enough, sought free space at a Jewish community center for a gay support group. For whatever reasons–perhaps, for all I know, homophobic ones–the request was denied. The activist wanted to put an advertisement of protest in a local Jewish newspaper, and the paper rejected his ad. He feel into a state of violent despair. He had found an issue. He wanted me to join his protest, perhaps to picket the newspaper. I asked to see the advertisement in question.

It was headed: A NEW HOLOCAUST.

That word.

I exploded in a rage about selfishness, self-involvement, the misuse of

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metaphor, disrespect for a word and a memory.

He looked at me indulgently. There I went, focussing on the wrong things again.

"Well, I want to get people's attention," he explained.

"You have no right."

Naturally, as it tends to do in such cases, this led to a discussion about whether I might be homophobic. I tried to explain that certain ideas can't be used to sell other ideas. The Holocaust shouldn't be brought out to cadge free office space.

There is difficulty using it as an occasion for literature, too, which is one of the starting points for the few great writings on the subject–the words of those who bore witness and were able to tell something. Yet, despite queasiness, the event is continually present, surely for all Jews–when we make love; when our children are born; when we try to reckon with the Jewish idea that salvation is on earth, not in heaven, and in the works of humankind which the idea of God has helped to make possible.

Our troubles with both the word and deed, the idea and the memory, are now fixed in our lives forever, and in the lives of those who come after us.

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At age near ninety, my cousin in Paris is still practicing medicine. I imagine one of the reasons for his present survival is will–he is the last of a line but for his son, now the only representatives in Europe of an extended family. In cheerful lunches at his apartment, on Avenue de la Bastille, we joke about wine and cheese, America and France, the quirks of our relatives, and the shadow is there in the teasing, too. When a converted Jew became the Cardinal of Paris, he said, "The Chief Rabbi of France is Sephardic, but at least the Cardinal is Ashkenazic." When the French government released Arab terrorists, played that pro-Arab game of oil and resentment which DeGaulle inaugurated at the end of his life, he turned somber about the nation which he had loved as an adopted child adores his new parents. "The reason the Arabs don't have magic carpets anymore," he said, "is that they don't need them. They just ask a Frenchman to lie down and they can ride on his back."

Each time, during my years of visiting France, he asks the old questions about our family in the United States, most of whom he has never met, with a greedy need for connection with something that endures. He is amused by my mother's pride that the two survivors from our family in Europe were both doctors. Perhaps there was a lesson there for me, she used to hint.

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When the son of old Dr. Waynberger, who became a distinguished cardiologist, married a young woman from one of the ancient Sephardic families which had been among "the Pope's Jews" in Avignon, I recognized the pride and relief of his mother and father. The line would not stop. Surely now it would not stop.

The idea of humanity seems to be a guest thought which we entertain because we love our parents, our children, perhaps our husbands, wives, lovers. The German woman I met at Big Sur was tormented by the imagination of continuity, the line backwards and forwards in time, a father who fell away from her, leaving traces she did not dare follow. She is a psychoanalyst who wonders if her father was a criminal, a coward, a time-server, a man crazed by horrors, or merely a father unsustained in troubles by the thought of his child. The miracle of biology fashioned her–she is an intelligent and beautiful woman–and she took this profession, which is all about continuity, while she possesses only scraps of past and she cannot accept them. Without a past we can participate in, we're not sure we can hold on to the idea of humanity. Our own reality is blurred. For most of us in this part of the century, humanity is not more than a guest idea.

For a Jew, the idea persists. One of the survivors I met in Paris in 1949 had written a book in tribute to the murdered Jewish artists. I don't remember his name, I couldn't read Yiddish, but I sat with him as we looked at the photographs and illustrations and he translated the biographies printed on facing pages.

There was a dedication. I wondered which of his family, which of the artists, he would remember in this way. I asked him to translate it. He explained, "In the camp, one of them said to me, You Jews will be remembered. We are forgotten."

His book in memory of the murdered Jewish artists is dedicated to the Gypsies.

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Jed Perl

SEEING MAPPLETHORPE

I first saw Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs, including some of the sexually explicit ones, at the Robert Miller Gallery on Fifth Avenue about a decade ago. One show included s-and-m scenes that went way beyond anything that had been exhibited in a mainstream art gallery before. Even if you'd looked at hard-core pornography, there were some pictures of bondage and mutilation that could stop you in your tracks; and then there was the surprise of this appearing in an elegantly appointed midtown gallery–between Fifty-sixth and Fifty-seventh Streets, with windows looking onto Tiffany and Bonwit Teller. Many of us told friends to go and check out that show. For people who knew the gay leather bars and back rooms at firsthand, it was a crossover event–a case of minority tastes moving toward the mainstream. For anyone who didn't it was at the very least a glimpse into an unfamiliar world. Whether you liked the work or not, it was a show you didn't forget. And as Mapplethorpe's career developed, that was about the farthest out in terms of subject matter that he ever went, at least in his gallery shows. In the eighties he tended to exhibit far less hard-core imagery at Robert Miller. His flowers and portraits and nudes must have been easier to sell. And, after telling all, maybe there was a feeling, both on the part of the artist and those close to him, that there was nothing much left to tell.

Now Mapplethorpe's photographs of s-and-m sex between consenting adult males and of children in erotic poses are the subject of a national debate. Mapplethorpe and his work had been receiving considerable media attention before he died of AIDS last March at the age of forty-two. But it was the decision of the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D. C. (which is largely supported by public funds) to cancel its leg of a travelling Mapplethorpe retrospective called "The Perfect Moment" that brought the debate about the photographer's work onto the floor of the United States Senate. In cancelling a show that had already been seen in Philadelphia and Chicago, Christina Orr-Cahall, Director of the Corcoran, gave the following explanation. The museum wasn't making a judgement on Mapplethorpe's photography, but on the advisability of showing such provocative work at a time of Federal budgetary discussion, when the policies of the National Endowment for the Arts (which had put up thirty thousand dollars for the Mapplethorpe show) were

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under intense scrutiny from conservatives on Capitol Hill. As things turned out, "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment" did go up in Washington, at the Washington Project for the Arts (which is itself in part supported by NEA funds). Soon after, the House of Representatives voted to cut NEA funds by a symbolic forty-five thousand dollars–the amount that the NEA had given for the Mapplethorpe show and for a grant that was awarded by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem to the artist Andres Serrano, whose work includes a photograph of a crucifix submerged in the artist's own urine. Then the Senate voted to ban funding for five years to the organizations that had supported the work of Mapplethorpe and Serrano. And then, the next day, in a virtually empty Senate chamber, Jesse Helms introduced a resolution barring Federal arts funds from being used to "promote, disseminate or produce obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts." The measure passed, though as I write in early August its chances of surviving conference in September are deemed unlikely. All this was going on at the same time as the Supreme Court's decision declaring flag-burning to be a constitutionally protected form of free speech was dominating the news. And since earlier in the year there had been a controversy in Chicago about a flag being trampled as part of an art show, the Mapplethorpe question and the flag-burning question began to merge in people's minds.

By now there seems to be general agreement that in cancelling the Mapplethorpe show the Corcoran made a major gaffe. The Corcoran's action had the reverse effect of what was intended: instead of deflecting Congressional attention from Mapplethorpe's work, it thrust questions of art and pornography into the worst possible arena, a near-hysterical public debate. Meanwhile, Jesse Helms has been making statements such as "I like beautiful things, not modern art," that have exposed, if it wasn't obvious already, the grotesquerie of the right-wing position. But even if the NEA manages to elude the most egregious assaults on its autonomy, the long-term effects of pressure from those whose interest in art extends only so far as legislating it are ominous. NEA policy is going to be colored by this controversy for a long time to come.

Congressional intervention in the decision-making processes of the NEA gives renewed credibility to one of the old arguments against any form of government subsidy for the arts: if they fund you they can censor you. But by now the NEA is so deeply knit into American art culture that it can't be done without, and the imposition of politically-based standards of decency on the NEA could have a censorious effect on culture at large. To say this, however, isn't to say that the issues raised by the Mapplethorpe controversy

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are all black and white. Of the many concerned citizens who've gone into print, the painter Helen Frankenthaler, writing in an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times,* strikes me as closest to the mark. Frankenthaler speaks as a person who has sat on NEA panels in the past. "I, for one, would not want to support [Mapplethorpe and Serrano], but once supported, we must allow them to be shown. . . .I find myself in a bind: Congress in a censoring uproar on one hand and, alas, a mediocre art enterprise on the other!"

I agree with Frankenthaler that Robert Mapplethorpe doesn't amount to much as an artist. His photographs of hothouse flowers and figures from high society are elegant but facile. His more provocative works hold our attention longer only because of the unexpected disjuncture between the silvery luxe of the style and the unabashed libidinousness of the subject matter. But to say that Mapplethorpe doesn't amount to much as an artist doesn't in any way deny the seriousness of the challenge that he and his supporters have posed to received ideas of what is possible in art. The Mapplethorpe controversy raises important questions about the relation of order and outrage, convention and innovation–in art in particular and in culture in general.

Mapplethorpe made his appeal to a sophisticated modern public–a public for whom events such as Nijinsky's simulated masturbation *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* in 1912 are monuments of Western civilization. When this audience was confronted with the farthest-out Mapplethorpes, its sense of history told it that it couldn't just turn and walk away. And Mapplethorpe upped the ante by making a very conscious decision to present his public with images that flaunted their obscenity: a three- or four-year-old girl with her skirt hitched up to her waist and nothing on underneath; a diptych in the first panel of which a penis is in some sort of metal restraint, and in the second of which the restraint has been moved in such a way that the penis appears to have burst. When Mapplethorpe exhibited photographs such as these, was he using the public's–our–confidence or abusing it? In answering this question we must keep two things in mind: our allegiance is to the internal logic of artistic experience, but what we value in the formalized universe of art has some relation to our other values.

Robert Mapplethorpe came before the public at the end of the seventies as an aesthete and a sexual provocateur. At a time when the art scene was shaking off a decade of self-imposed asceticism his appeal was assured. The smoothly graduated grays of his photographs evoked the high-style fun of the fashion photography of the thirties and forties. His work told the people who were just then abandoning Studio 54 for points south of Fourteenth Street that there was nothing to be ashamed of–neither a taste for expensive hothouse flowers nor for back-room sex. Mapplethorpe's own matinee-idol good looks were a part of the story that his photographs told, and those who

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got to know him found an arresting personality–a Manhattanite on overdrive, with an appetite for life both high and low. After news spread that Mapplethorpe had AIDS, the artist chronicled his long battle with the disease in photographs of his own increasingly ravaged face; in the last self-portrait Mapplethorpe holds a walking stick topped off with a skull. His death earlier this year occasioned an outpouring of critical encomiums that was unusual, even in this Age of Instant Celebrity, for an artist who a decade earlier had been virtually unknown.

Given how charged his work was and his life ended up being, it would be absurd to expect anybody to respond to Mapplethorpe coolly. But what happened even before his death, around the time the Whitney mounted a retrospective in the summer of 1988, was very strange indeed. People began to act as if Mapplethorpe was exactly what he had never been–a middle-of-the-road guy. There's often something vague and euphemistic about the terms in which this very hard-edged and specific artist is dealt with. When Ingrid Sischy, the former editor of *Artforum*, titles an essay for the catalogue of the Whitney show "A Society Artist" it sounds almost coy. And the name of the show that arrived at the Washington Project for the Arts in June is a little odd as well: "The Perfect Moment" suggests the sort of bland hyperbole one would use when readers weren't supposed to know that the subject was very sexy.

Museum people have their reasons for skirting over Mapplethorpe's hard-core side: they don't want to lose the public. But what reason do critics have for sounding so damn blasé? Why does there seem to be this need to demonstrate that someone who held the fashionable world in thrall with his bad-boy behavior was actually just the boy next door? I have a friend who says of political attitudes toward homosexuality: "The radical right might put gays in concentration camps, but the liberals would do worse–they'd force gays to go to psychiatrists." In a way that's exactly what the liberal critics are doing with Mapplethorpe: they sanitize and sentimentalize him, they explain that all the fuss has been about nothing, that we all feel the same way. These are roughly the terms in which Mark Stevens described Mapplethorpe in a review of the Whitney show, published in *The New Republic* last September. "I find none of Mapplethorpe's photographs especially unsettling," Stevens wrote. "Even the picture of Mapplethorpe [with a whip up his anus] is curiously unaffecting; it is so staged that we feel safely distant, part of an audience. . . .Mapplethorpe is easy to like. . . .Except to those who are threatened by homosexuality...these photographs will seem cozy. That's the surprise." Michael Brenson, writing about "Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment" in *The New York Times* at the height of the controversy, went even farther in this direction. He seemed to end up arguing that Mapplethorpe

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spoke for Middle America:

> Mapplethorpe is not a marginal figure. On television, desire is turned loose in a hundred different directions and there is hardly a product that is not sold by arousing a wish for sexual possession and power. American culture swings back and forth between domination and submission–rushing to put people on pedestals and then rushing just as hard to prove they are indeed no different and perhaps worse than you and I.

This could be the ultimate put-down of Mapplethorpe and his world: all those people who thought they'd travelled to the outer limits of experience might just as well have stayed with their parents in Floral Park and watched "Dynasty" on the tube.

The real question about Mapplethorpe's work isn't whether it shocks: it does. Ingrid Sischy is absolutely right to say, "When these pictures first appeared there were shivers and most often people turned away, myself included." And she's right to say that Mapplethorpe aims to reach the stomach, a feeling "brought on by intensified or intensifying sensations, emotions, and perceptions." The real question is: Does Mapplethorpe provoke us in order to discomfit us or in order to draw us in? Does he make us question our values and assumptions and then stop there? Which would make him a sort of social commentator. Or does he shake us up in order to engage us in a new range of experiences? Which is what an artist does. When Sischy says that Mapplethorpe "is an artist who has made a deep incision into our culture," she is really praising him as a provocateur. But that doesn't tell us if the provocation is transformed into art.

There is a modern painter who provokes us in order to open up new expressive possibilities: Balthus. The paintings of girls with lifted skirts that Balthus did in the thirties and forties press our buttons in exactly the same way as Mapplethorpe's photograph of a little girl. Then there are the differences: the age of the model (Mapplethorpe's is younger); Balthus's tendency to keep the underpants on; the particular sorts of manipulations and provocations that photography as opposed to paint-on-canvas sets off; Balthus's virtuoso technique and formal inventiveness as opposed to the prosaic symmetry of Mapplethorpe's composition. What all these differences add up to is a difference in intent. Balthus uses a transgression to pull us into a complex invented world–a world that we're urged to make sense of. Mapplethorpe thrusts a transgression at us–and leaves us to mull over our views on childhood, eroticism, pornography. Mapplethorpe makes contro-

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versy; Balthus makes art that stirs up controversy.

Curiously, some of the same people who praise Mapplethorpe have condemned Balthus. A painter I know says of this situation: "What they can't stand about Balthus is the fact that he constructs a painting." Apparently the art world finds pornographic imagery acceptable only to the extent that it transgresses against the idea of the self-sufficient work of art. Balthus's transgressions, which are also imaginative reconstructions, pose a threat all right–but it is not the threat it is said to be. What is threatening about Balthus is the erotic conviction that the artist brings to an imagined world.

Balthus is the artist to look to right now. In a period of half-baked erotic art his oeuvre is proof that erotic perversity can given new life to old forms. At the same time, Balthus has never overplayed his hand. In certain instances he has even practiced self-censorship. When James Thrall Soby bought *The Street*(1933) a couple of years after it was painted he found, as he explained in a letter published in Sabine Rewald's book on Balthus, that the section in which the boy puts his hand under the girl's skirt created insurmountable difficulties:

> I hung the picture in the living room in my house in. . .Farmington. I finally had to put it in a vault because my son–then about nine–and his friends would cluster around it and rush home and tell their mothers about the naughty passage they'd seen. I had always wanted to give the picture to the Museum of Modern Art, but I knew it couldn't be hung in a public gallery, and I finally wrote Balthus in despair that this was a very great picture doomed never to be seen. To my utter astonishment, and I'd known Balthus personally for years–he wrote back that if I would send him the picture he would be glad to try to change the passage in question. . . .He kept the painting for nearly two years and in 1955 turned it over to me. He said, "I used to want to shock, but now it bores me."

It is also probably not by accident that Balthus's most perverse painting was long kept from public view. *The Rape,* in which a female music teacher grabs at her girl student, exposing her pubis, was painted in 1934 and kept in a back room, available only to selected viewers, during Balthus's first one-man show at Galerie Pierre. It was not exhibited in public for over forty years, until 1977, when it was part of Balthus's one-man show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. There is reason to believe that both its obscurity and its ultimate appearance at the gallery of Pierre Matisse, the artist's longtime friend and dealer, were orchestrated by the artist himself. As for the artist's motives, they may well have gone like this. At the time *The Rape* was painted,

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its subject matter was so provocative that the audience would have been unable to experience it as art (and the gallery might have had trouble with the police); whereas now, with all that the audience has been exposed to, people will be able to enter into the logic of this work of art. If the curators who organize Mapplethorpe shows had a tenth of Balthus's or of James Thrall Soby's understanding of the audience, they would understand that the Robert Miller Gallery is exactly the place where Mapplethorpe's s-and-m photographs ought to be seen. The enlarged, heterogeneous museum-going public may be shocked or bemused: they are not ready to deal with this stuff as art.

In a front-page article in the "Arts and Leisure" section of the *Sunday New York Times* that appeared shortly after the Corcoran cancelled the Mapplethorpe show and weeks before the Helms amendment was introduced, Hilton Kramer observed of the controversy: "This is a problem that the art world has brought upon itself." That's a pretty bizarre statement, considering that Kramer wouldn't have been writing an article about Mapplethorpe in the *Times* if the radical right hadn't decided it was time to start censoring the NEA. But there is an element of truth in what Kramer has to say: maybe if people weren't so intent on proving that Mapplethorpe is Every Photographer there would be a bit more reluctance about sending his photographs on tour all over America. Kramer, however, made the whole question of whether or not Mapplethorpe's sexually explicit work ought to be on national tour sound more open-and-shut than it really is. "Images of this sort," he said, "which are designed to aggrandize and abet erotic rituals involving coercion, degradation, bloodshed and the infliction of pain, cannot be regarded as anything but a violation of public decency." The problem with this construction is that it sweeps aside Nijinsky's *L'Aprés-Midi d'un Faune* and a whole lot of other works of art that bring a private world of erotic fantasy and experience into public view. If the NEA is going to support the best art of our times, the NEA's judgements must take into account the fact that some of the best art of the last one hundred and fifty years has involved assaults on public decency.

But the NEA is going to make reasoned judgements about the place of outrage within art, it is going to have to think long and hard about the relationship between audience experience and aesthetic experience. Assaulting people isn't a particularly sophisticated way to assert artistic authority. And the people who see every assault as an assertion don't get the difference. When Richard Goldstein wrote on Mapplethorpe in the *Village Voice*, he focussed on the right issue: the relation of public morality to art. But he confused matters by bringing in the pornographic paintings that had been included in the Courbet show at the Brooklyn Museum last fall. Goldstein's ar-

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ticle opened with a stunning photographic juxtaposition: Mapplethorpe's *Man in Polyester Suit*, 1980, with an enormous penis hanging out of an unzipped fly, was set next to Courbet's *Origin of the World*, circa 1866, a close-up look between a woman's spread legs. When Goldstein asked why people could support the showing of the Courbet and not of the Mapplethorpe and concluded, "Homophobia," he missed the point.

Courbet's picture was created for a private patron almost one hundred and twenty-five years go. It had never before been shown in public. Its most recent owner, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, had kept it behind a special screen designed by the Surrealist painter André Masson that consisted of an abstract variation on Courbet's theme. In her history of French psychoanalysis, Elisabeth Roudinesco refers to Masson's painting as a "protective covering" and explains that a "secret system" enabled viewers to remove the Masson and view the Courbet. Now if Lacan and Masson, luminaries of the French avant-garde world that made a cult of De Sade and all manner of perversity, felt some need to frame or set apart the Courbet when it was hanging in a private home, what on earth is Goldstein talking about? The fact is that 1988 may be exactly the time for that Courbet to go public, for people to accept its assault on decency and go beyond it. (And people still wondered about bringing their children.) By the logic of Goldstein's juxtaposition, Mapplethorpe's erotic photographs shouldn't go public until the end of the twenty-first century. I doubt that by then anybody will even remember who Mapplethorpe was.

Important artists do sometimes choose to administer shocks to public standards of morality. An NEA that can't support them when they do so is condemned to prudery and academicism. Yet it will take people who value art as art to understand when an assault on public morals is a matter of importance to art. Helen Frankenthaler is right to say that ultimately we must focus our attention on what goes on within the NEA. Quality is something about which everybody will never agree, but that doesn't make the effort to come to some sort of agreement any less essential. As in every question about art that we confront today, the real argument is between those who believe in the autonomy of the work of art and those who see the work of art as little more than a message sent out into the world to do battle with other messages. The people who don't believe that art can transcend everyday experience have already made an assault on art beside which pornography's assault on public morals pales. Those who know that art can transcend our everyday experience know that art does this in a number of different ways and that eroticism, perverse, or otherwise, is one method.

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BOOKS

AMBIGUITIES OF FELLOW TRAVELLING

THE FELLOW TRAVELLERS. INTELLECTUAL FRIENDS OF COMMUNISM. Revised and Updated Edition. By David Caute. Yale University Press. $45.00.

The Fellow Travellers was first published in 1973 with the subtitle, Postscript to the Enlightenment. It documented thoughtfully a remarkable if distasteful chapter in Western intellectual history: the unrestrained admiration of the Soviet Union under Stalin on the part of important and respected Western intellectuals. The book also included a brief chapter on McCarthyism entitled, "The Witch Hunt," which dealt with the persecution of American communists and fellow travellers. (Subsequently Caute developed this chapter into a book on the same topic, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Campaign under Truman and Eisenhower*, published in 1978.)

Unhappily, the new edition largely retains the structure of the old except for the removal of a chapter on McCarthyism and the addition of brief chapters on Vietnam and Cuba; the chapter on China has been substantially expanded. Part Three remains somewhat unfocused and retains the chapter entitled "The Reckoning," dealing almost exclusively with Sartre; in turn, the chapter entitled "The Cold War" remains in part a foray into McCarthyism, in part a description of political conditions after World War II, and includes a discussion of Ilya Ehrenburg, "Russia's leading fellow traveller"), bewilderingly enough put into the same conceptual category as Western naifs living in open societies. As is always the case when a first editions is reprinted "revised and updated," the reviewer and reader are curious to know what prompted the new edition and in what way do the revisions and updating make it different from the original one?

In an exceedingly short preface to the new edition, the author ostensibly undertook to explain. But there is little explanation to be found, only off-the-cuff hints and allusions. Thus the chapter on China was expanded given the abundance of new material and perhaps also because "there was never any excuse for romanticizing.. . . .the Cultural Revolution." As to the chapter on Vietnam, there is a one-paragraph discussion of Vietnam in the preface which notes that during the sixties and seventies it became a "burning issue," but there is basically no explanation for why Caute decided to chronicle

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(however briefly) in the new edition the tours of "Western intellectuals, who, visiting Hanoi, during the war, experienced some enchantment and succumbed to familiar illusions." It may be self-evident why such episodes represent a continuation of the earlier pro-Soviet attitudes but not if Caute's understanding of "fellow travelling" remains the guiding concept. Nor is there much of an explanation for including in the new edition a chapter on pro-Cuban fellow travelling, especially since, according to the author, "fellow travelling" is not the appropriate concept for the favorable attitudes regarding Cuba. He does explain, though, why this topic was omitted from the first edition as he seeks to distinguish the fellow travellers of the past from those of the present, that is, the old from the new left. He writes:

> In the introduction to the first edition of *Fellow Travellers* I argued Cuba out of these pages on the premise that Castro's revolution was an altogether different phenomenon attracting a different species of Western admirer: "The aims, ideology and life styles of the New Left have practically nothing in common with those of yesterday's fellow travellers: they squarely belonged to the Old Left. Those militants of the New Left who ardently admire Mao's China or Castro's Cuba adopt those regimes as models for their own revolutionary activities." One would like to know if he still believes that old and new left have nothing in common, having added Cuba and its admirers to the new edition.

Nobody would dispute that there are differences between the leftists of the 1930s and those of the 1960s and 1970s. But there have also been weighty and unifying similarities which are given short shrift in *The Fellow Travellers*, old and new edition alike. The major similarity, needless to say, has been that both groups fervently embraced wildly idealized, almost delusional conceptions of various Marxist-Leninist one-party systems, perceived as far superior to their own societies. Old and new left shared a passionate rejection of capitalism and "bourgeois democracy" and an urge to find alternatives, new social systems which could command their loyalties.

There are numerous indications that the division between the erstwhile admirers of the Soviet Union and the partisans of the newer socialist states were not nearly as sharp as Caute seems to believe. Many former supporters of the Soviet Union had effortlessly switched to championing the new Communist states: Cuba, China, North Vietnam and others in the so-called Third World. Waldo Frank, venerable admirer of the Soviet Union, produced not only *Dawn in Russia* (in 1932) but also *Cuba: Prophetic Island* (in

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1961). Scott Nearing, another steady supporter of the Soviet Union, also professed to be very favorably impressed by Cuba in his book, *Making of a Radical*. Corliss Lamont, one of the most persistent pro-Soviet fellow travellers, and incidentally also a political activist of sorts, subsequently came to admire China; Anna Louis Strong relocated from the Soviet Union to China in a most tangible demonstration of her shift in loyalties. The list could easily be extended. It is also relevant here to point out that the younger generation of committed new left activists whom Caute differentiate from the old-style fellow travellers were in many instances "red diaper babies," children of old-left, pro-Soviet parents. Thus, if it was the discontinuity between old and new left that dissuaded Caute in the first place from discussing pro-Cuban (and other, non-Soviet) forms of fellow travelling, it was in many ways a questionable distinction. But, on the other hand, if he still believes that the classical fellow traveller was a distinct species, then why add the new breed of sympathizers?

It would seem that the omission of Cuba from the first edition of the book may have had more tangible reasons: the ambivalent sympathies of the author himself. While not in the same class as other favorably predisposed Western political tourists, Caute too had a soft spot for Cuba which self-irony could not obliterate: "For how many years have I sworn to make this holy pilgrimage to the new Mecca of permanent revolution.. . . ."and so on, he wrote facetiously in a book about his own tour of the island ambiguously entitled *Cuba, Yes?* (1974). This book goes unmentioned in the new edition of *The Fellow Travellers*; neither in the preface, nor in the chapter on Cuba is there any reference to the author's own experiences and earlier views of that country, or to their revision, and if so, the grounds for the reassessment. The only reference to *Cuba, Yes?* is buried in a note constituting the source of the views of a Cuban academic official quoted in the text.

Although while touring Cuba Caute did not suffer the total suspension of disbelief and even argued with the official guides, his skepticism often faltered. For example, he recalled his feelings after witnessing a gigantic demonstration organized by the government: "For us, Cuba has suddenly fulfilled her promise and we too are happy." The "we too" was made in reference to the Cuban participants in the demonstration who were described as "euphorically happy and proud." While he noted that the mass spectacle in question was organized by the government, he still saw it as a bona fide "demonstration of solidarity," "dreamlike and elusive." He was also persuaded that "almost every Cuban regards himself as Fidel's *companero*.". and totally identifies with the political system–an observation hardly better informed than many of those he justifiably ridiculed in *The Fellow Travellers*.

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Nor was skepticism in evidence when he regurgitated the official figures about gains in health care and education, and especially in overcoming illiteracy by converting barracks to classrooms. Such lapses of skepticism also allowed him to justify the lack of elections: "It must be admitted, elections in a country like Cuba are deeply divisive. . . ."; many readers would also feel uncomfortable with his all too judicious reflections on revolutionary violence: "foreign critics must remember that revolution and civil war are not a general election.. . . ." A long section describing his depressing meeting with a Cuban writer no longer free to publish ends abruptly with, "But enough of this gloom. . . ." as he cuts to sunny Varadero Beach. *Cuba, Yes?* (like both editions of *The Fellow Travellers*) ends inconclusively, the author seemingly determined not to sum up, evaluate, or draw conclusions.

It is not surprising then that the new chapter on Cuba (and coincidentally the entire new edition of *The Fellow Travellers*) ends on the following dispirited note: "This may be an apposite point at which to conclude a journey in intellectual history spanning sixty years but now–perhaps–at a dead end." For one thing, the phenomenon in question is far from being at a dead end as the immense popularity of political tourism to Nicaragua has shown; more importantly, it is hardly apposite to conclude a book without an attempt to evaluate the range of phenomena it described. A failure to do so is particularly conspicuous in a second edition that provides a longer time span for putting matters into a historical perspective and thus affords new opportunities for a summation.

Perhaps one reason for this reluctance to seek more illuminating conclusions may be found in what was and appears to remain the major theoretical premise of the original study. It is put forward in identical form in Chapter Seven of both editions entitled "A Postscript to the Enlightenment." (These words also used to serve, but no longer do, as subtitle of the book. If Caute finds the proposition entailed in this phrase less apt today than at the time of the first edition, he does not say; retaining the chapter but not the subtitle adds to the ambiguities.) Still, the chapter is there, and it does include the gist of the theoretical argument. In fact, both editions might have concluded more satisfactorily with this chapter. Although inexplicably not used as a concluding chapter, the theme "the postscript to enlightenment" seeks to provide understanding of the phenomenon the author sought to chronicle. The problem is that there was more (or less, depending on how we look at it) to fellow travelling than the appeal of the values of the Enlightenment misidentified as inspiring the Soviet system. "The postscript to enlightenment" thesis has its problems even in regard to the by-gone attractions of the Soviet Union. At the same time Caute seems to suggest (correctly) that these Enlightenment values do not adequately explain the attractions of Cuba and

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China, but nowhere is this matter discussed systematically and at any length. The gist of the argument was presented by Caute as follows:

> In its more serious intellectual aspects, the phenomenon of fellow-travelling can best be understood as a postscript to the Enlightenment...It signified a return to the eighteenth-century vision of a rational, educated and scientific society based on the maximization of resources and the steady improvement...of human nature...Knowledge and morality are once more viewed as complementary...[the fellow travellers]...had little difficulty in convincing themselves that what was taking shape in Russia in the thirties was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but the benevolent despotism of enlightened, disinterested pedagogues working for the common good.

It is certainly true that for many fellow travellers the attractions of the Soviet systems were associated with reverence for applied reason, science, education, planning, rationality, a true meritocracy, and so on, all of which could be linked to the Enlightenment. But there was more to the appeals of the Soviet system even in the 1930s; above all it fascinated Western intellectuals because it promised to end all social injustices and at the same time to make life meaningful by creating a sense of community and purpose. Caute's argument has been partially correct but incomplete; neither did it fully explain the appeals of the Soviet system, nor in turn were the values of the Enlightenment totally irrelevant to the appeals of the new Communist systems in Cuba, China, and elsewhere. What have been missing are the links between "fellow travelling" (used here to signify the strong emotional pull of various communist systems in the 1930s as well as the sixties, seventies, and eighties) and a romantic rejection of modernity, especially of the Western capitalist kind. Granted this type of motivation was stronger in more recent times than in the 1930s, it was not altogether absent in the thirties either, nor were the attractions of primitivism, authenticity, sense of community, and so on totally dominating the sensibilities of the travellers to China, Cuba, and other countries at the exclusion of the older Enlightenment values (often also discerned in these new settings).

Indeed, neither earlier nor in more recent times can the attraction of these systems be reduced to matters purely political or economic; they were counterpoints or alternatives to what the social critics (who the fellow travellers always were) perceived to be the moral corruption, injustice and decadence of their own society. In other words, much of the fellow travelling originated in estrangement and has been in a large measure a response to the discomforts of secularization, rather than a new link to the Enlightenment,

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which was a decisive historical stage in the process of secularization. At the same time, the motives of the fellow travellers of both generations were mixed: there were elements of both a romantic communitarianism combined with longing for meaning, purpose and authenticity on the one hand and a quest for greater rationality, material progress, and so on on the other.

Some of these problems in *The Fellow Travellers* were also noted by critics of the first edition which in general was favorably reviewed on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus Richard Crossman wrote (in *The Listener)* of Caute's attempt "to fit all the fellow travellers into a single philosophical formula...In fact [they] never belonged to a single philosophical species..." The critic of *The Guardian* too noted "the treatment of some of the characters as simple theoretical constructs" ; likewise the *Times Literary Supplement* found the-postscript-to-Enlightenment thesis unsatisfactory, as did Lewis Feuer observing (in *Survey*), "The fellow travellers. . .were less children of the Enlightenment than the heirs to the Platonic aspiration toward the status of philosopher kings."

It is something of a mystery why Caute when preparing a new edition resolved to overlook such comments and chose to avert his eyes from alternative theories which could supplement rather than replace his own. This is all the more puzzling since he is also aware of a study produced by this reviewer (*Political Pilgrims*, 1981) which pursues at some length the alternative argument outlined above. His familiarity with this work is demonstrated by some ten references to the volume, all of them to source materials which had been used in it. There are also many identical quotations and sources included in the new edition of *The Fellow Travellers* without reference to *Political Pilgrims*, where they had also appeared earlier. (Approximately two-thirds of all sources used for the new chapters on China, Cuba, and Vietnam are identical to those used in *Political Pilgrims*.) Despite such awareness of a book addressed to issues strikingly similar to those tackled by Caute, there is not a single substantive reference to anything said or argued in *Political Pilgrims,* although it was diligently mined for source materials. (*Political Pilgrims* took note of all similar endeavors, as is the scholarly convention, including the first edition of *Fellow Travellers*, commenting on its substantive arguments, noting areas of agreement and disagreement.)

The limitations of both editions may also have something to do with Caute's affinity with the moral equivalence thesis (which stipulates that there are no substantial moral distinctions to be made between Western capitalist and Soviet-type socialist systems, or between the United States and the Soviet Union). In the preface to the new edition, he takes notes of a criticism he received from the left and then goes on to make this telling point:

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> Probably the dichotomy between 'communism' and 'capitalism' is meaningless. One may suspect that the great failing of left-wing intellectuals in capitalist democracies is to undervalue their own societies and to romanticize populist or socialist one-party states further afield. The comparable failing on the Right is to maintain a shabby silence about the chain of skulls which Moloch carries around his distended neck.

As is so often the case, moral symmetries dissolve on closer inspection to reveal a far greater sense of indignation aimed at the right than the left. The right is "shabby" and associated with "the chain of skulls" ; the left may only be "suspected" of the failing "to undervalue," although it is not difficult to think of comparable, indeed far more substantial chains or mounds of skulls the left kept silent about, produced by the political systems it supported.

Perhaps the deficiencies of the whole enterprise appear more glaring in the new edition than in the old because of the halfhearted attempt to make it a more ambitious project, a chronicle of fellow travelling that transcends the Soviet case. But if so, the author never quite made up his mind whether or not the recent generation should be considered "fellow travellers" or something else; he emphasizes in the preface how they differed from their predecessors, being youthful political activists committed to revolutionary change in their own society, rather than famous intellectuals quite tolerant of the status quo in their own country. And while the postscript-to-enlightenment theme does not work too well for the new cases (China, Cuba,Vietnam), there is no coherent or sustained attempt to offer a new theory for these episodes. Caute is strangely inhibited from taking a more analytical and probing approach, one which would shed light on the entire question of why these people became "friends of communism" as the new subtitle describes his subjects.

I suspect that Caute thinks of himself as "a man of the left." This modest hypothesis makes it easier to understand why in his survey of the infatuation of Western intellectuals with communist systems, he steadfastly declines to entertain the possibility that the delusions of these intellectuals were produced in equal measure by the questionable character of the objects of their devotion (including the ideals these systems sought to implement) and their own needs which had little to do with the objective realities of the societies "further afield."

PAUL HOLLANDER

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ART AND UTOPIA

THE UTOPIAN FUNCTION OF ART AND LITERATURE: SELECTED ESSAYS. By Ernest Bloch. Translated by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. M.I.T Press. $25.00.

Ernest Bloch inhabited the intellectual milieu of George Lukacs, Theodore Adorno, and Bertolt Brecht, among others. He had been a student in a seminar given by George Simmel, where he met Georg Lukacs. Lukacs and he became friends and later philosophical adversaries. Like many of his German-Jewish intellectual contemporaries, he was a refugee from Nazism, first in England and then in the United States. Unlike Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the leading figures of the Frankfort School, Bloch never found regular employment until late in life. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, he was able to compose *The Principle of Hope* and *Subjekt-Objekt* in Widener Library, while his wife supported him, working first as a domestic and later in a Boston architect's office. in 1948, Bloch at the age of sixty-three was offered the chair of philosophy at the University of Leipzig in East Germany, the first teaching post he had ever held. While he was on vacation in West Germany in 1961, the East Germans put up the Berlin Wall. Bloch decided not to return to East Germany. He died in 1977 at the age of ninety-two.

Bloch's affinities with the Frankfort School were profound but uneasy. The opening essay of this collection contains a discussion between Bloch and Adorno on "the contradictions of utopian longing," which makes them sound like alter egos. There is scarcely a difference of view between them. Yet he was ostracized by Adorno's colleague, Max Horkheimer, for his Stalinist defense of the Soviet Union. Bloch had defended the Soviet regime in its conduct of the show trials of 1936, and he continued to justify police measures in the Soviet Union and East Germany on the familiar theory of imperialist encirclement. But Bloch's defense of the Soviet Union represents only one side of his political and intellectual personality. Another side shows him to be a critic of Stalinism, an advocate of aesthetic and intellectual freedom, though the criticism and advocacy occurred within a context of loyalty to the Soviet Union. It is clear from this collection of essays and from his other works (he was the author of seventeen books) that Bloch is a writer of extraordinary complexity, whose philosophical achievement is not to be reduced to Stalinist politics. Of all the significant anti-Nazi German thinkers in the Marxist and Hegelian tradition, he is perhaps the least known and the least understood.

Consider, for example, the anomaly of a Marxian utopian with Stalinist

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tendencies. Engels had long ago consigned utopian thinking to the naive bourgeois prehistory of Marxism. Whatever original inspirational value it may have had in the early development of socialist thinking, utopian and scientific socialism had become adversaries. For Bloch "the Utopian function" is of permanent intellectual, imaginative, and political value.

Literature and art constitute the space that anticipates the future. Phrases like "anticipatory illumination," "not-yet-conscious" and "not-yet-accomplished" recur in the essays. Literature and art point to (it would be misleadingly strong to say embody) the realization of the ideals that are often forgotten in the present struggles for power. They are cautions against the tendency toward self-betrayal that characterizes revolutionary movements. Jack Zipes, his editor and translator, locates the revolutionary dream in its bourgeois origins. As a "product of the *Bildungsburgertum*, the incarnation of all the bourgeois liberal ideals of the nineteenth century. . .he sought to compel [the bourgeois tradition] to live up to [its] promises." In this perspective, the utopian is not a retrograde naivete, as it was for Engels, but a continuous exercise against a kind of *real politique* that engenders, for example, Stalinism.

The opposition between science and utopia in Marxist thought, however, does not illuminate the question of utopian aesthetic. By utopian Bloch means to dissociate himself from a realism which is a "reflection of facts" rather than of processes, a realism, in other words, oriented toward past and present rather than toward the future. Bloch's "futurism" enabled him to associate himself with expressionist art, surrealism, the work of Bertolt Brecht, and put him in opposition to Lukacs. Bloch avoids the didacticism of a teleological utopianism, by focussing on an indeterminate "surplus" in imaginative works, which transcends the constraints of the present. This "surplus" is associated with culture in contradistinction to ideology: that is, an hypostatized "rigid and existing postulated transcendence."

All this is very much at the level of abstraction. What does it mean in artistic practice? The beginning of the essay "On Fine Arts in the Machine Age" (1964) is characteristic:

> It is certain that we do not suffer any more from plush. Rather we suffer from a little too much glass and steel and from a little too little of that which decorates. But whenever there is too much decoration, and when that occurred too much, much too much was covered over and made terribly slick and ostentatious. For not only in war but more so in the lie, the muses are silent. The semblance purchased in this way always takes shape accordingly. No purchase at all would be more preferable.

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At once advocate and critic of modernist functionalism, Bloch acknowledges and regrets the necessity of the disappearance of the ornamental. Decoration mystifies the truth, but its absence impoverishes it. Bloch discerns, or wishes to discern, tendencies toward a new decorativeness, or better, a new heterogeneity of form that will express the organic richness of life. In a somewhat ambivalent, but essentially admiring gesture toward Ruskin Bloch writes:

> The well-furnished machine aims to perform those tasks in a reduced amount of time whose artistic honor emanated from their difficulties, their size–as Ruskin taught us in his enchantingly sentimental way–and from the expression endowed in it by human hands. There will never be any expressionist houses built if one attaches great importance to unified form.

Elsewhere in the essay he refers to the "dismal. . .new houses" of "glass and steel," which make things pale instead of causing them to flourish. Bloch may have discerned the need for the baroque element in postmodernist architecture that stands as a reproach to the characterlessness of international modernism.

Openness, possibility, diversity: Bloch's aesthetic eclectically draws upon Schiller, Kant, Goethe, on those utopian anticipations in their work of spontaneity of will, sensuous exuberance, "a world. . .not satisfied by the mechanistic experience of existence." In an excursus in the essay, "Art and Utopia" (1918) Bloch prefers allegory for its "wealth of impression" to the symbol that repressively asserts "*Unitas* of a meaning." In the formal experiments of Renaissance art Bloch comes upon utopian meaning. Perspective represents the discovery of the world as "infinite," the wish-landscape as open distance. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Bloch is an unremitting critic of the mechanico-materialist side of the Enlightenment. There is something almost mystical in his feeling for the animistic, organic side of life, which however, he always seeks to reconcile with reason.

Bloch's valuing of utopianism allows him a tolerant view of what Marxist thinkers regard as most reprehensible, "false consciousness." "Without the utopian function it is impossible to explain the intellectual surplus that went beyond the status quo and that which had been accomplished, even if that surplus is filled with illusion instead of anticipatory illumination." Illusion or false consciousness is a necessary by-product of human aspiration. Bloch here is in the camp of freedom against the Enforcers of Truth–that is, the

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party line.

Bloch has an extraordinary eye and love for detail and a gift for discerning the "incognito of every living instance." But there is a price for utopianism, no matter how generously, how richly conceived. If life and meaning are always in the future, what are we to make of literature that desires to recapture the past, for example the work of Marcel Proust about whom Bloch has virtually nothing to say? Avowedly utopian fiction has always seemed thin and abstract in its texture. To be sure, Bloch's texts are not openly utopian in their intention: it is Bloch who discovers anticipations of the future in the dense *oratio obliqua*, for example, of Thomas Mann's art. But it is hard to ignore the feeling of strain, of a forcing of issues in order to produce a wished-for reality or a sense of direction toward that reality. What Marx called "the dead hand of the past" does not lie on *Remembrance of Things Past*. In an essay on the detective novel, Bloch incisively analyzes the formal characteristics of the genre and its significance:

> In all other narrative forms both deeds and misdeeds develop before the omnipresent reader. Here, on the contrary, the reader is absent when the misdeed occurs, a misdeed which, though brought home in a neat package, shuns the light of day and lingers in the background of the story. It must be brought to light, and this process itself is the sole theme.

The discussion ranges from Poe to Agatha Christie to Oedipus Rex, but for all its brilliance it seems little more than a preparation for the essay on the novel of the artist:

> Whereas the detective novel requires a press of collecting evidence, penetrating backward to a past crime, the novel of the artist requires recognition of and interest in the creative person who brings out something new instead of something past.

To subsume the imagination of the past in the genre of the detective novel is to reveal the limitations of a utopian aesthetics: it is to confine the territory of the past to the most mechanical of forms.

Utopia represents the principle of hope (the title of one of Bloch's major works). Hope is deeper than a principle, it is a fundamental human energy, cognate to another energy which has great prestige nowadays, desire. In contemporary discourse, desire is future-oriented: It "represents" the unrepresentable, that which cannot be named because it does not yet exist. It is the

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"principle" that resists reification, so that every so-called realization tends to betray it. It is always in process and therefore incomplete. But every process excludes other processes and is therefore a potential tyrant. A gaze (a favorite Blochian word) always directed toward the future may involve the repression of the vital forces of past and present. At his best, Bloch, I think, would agree.

EUGENE GOODHEART

FROM '68 TO '88

THE RADICAL RENEWAL: THE POLITICS OF IDEAS IN MODERN AMERICA. By Norman Birnbaum. Pantheon. $17.95.

The sixties have been taking a beating lately. An era which was so fond of debunking has in turn been debunked. The madness, the mindless mysticism, the descent into drugs and violence whose afterlife is being played out across America's disintegrating cities is by now obvious to almost all but the most devoted fans of John Lennon. And insult of insults, revisionist historians like Jack Diggins go so far as to argue that the forties and fifties were far more fertile culturally and intellectually.

The distinguished sociologist Norman Birnbaum will have none of this. His book, *The Radical Renewal,* an analysis of the politics of ideas over the past two decades, doesn't so much criticize the revisionist view of the sixties as ignore it. Birnbaum's tone, his sneering dismissal of conservative "imbeciles," call upon the vanished certainties of the late 1950s when the Republicans were still "the stupid party" and the promise of "advanced" social theory was still untested.

Birnbaum's points of reference are firmly rooted in the early years of the then new left when he was one of the few to challenge the formalist sociology of Talcott Parsons while praising the "populism" of C. Wright Mills. Now, a quarter of a century later, Birnbaum, a man justly renowned in the fifties and sixties for his independent perspective, stands as the guardian of left-wing orthodoxy. The truths Saint C. Wright revealed are, he insists, as valid now as they were then.

The bulk of *The Radical Renewal* is devoted to updating the received radical wisdom by way of loosely connected short summaries of recent

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scholarship on, among other topics, Rawlsianism, republicanism, feminism, and Freudianism. Designed to show how the "power elite" is still subtly controlling us all, these summaries are invariably followed by the familiar empty exhortations from the sixties about the need to rebuild/rethink. More often than not the rhetoric promises more than it delivers. "We do need to know," Birnbaum thunders, "at what point institutional opportunity and human potential can be best joined." And who can argue with that?

The text proper is followed by a bibliographic essay which is almost indistinguishable from the loosely connected skein of apercus which compose the body of the book. The typical section–a stream of bibliographic consciousness–consists of brief comments on a string of books and names. Birnbaum's purpose in presenting what are little more than his lecture notes seems avuncular. He wants, it appears, to recapture on paper the spirit of sixties campus bull sessions when a faculty guru would enlighten the initiates, usually anxious graduate students, long into the night by providing an annotated scorecard of which writers were or weren't kosher.

The hordes of graduate students have long fled from the lure of sweeping social criticism, but Birnbaum has done those who remain a disservice. This is an account of political and intellectual life which astoundingly contains no mention of the most powerful intellectual currents of the seventies and eighties. Neither Wittgenstein and neoromanticism, nor Nietzsche, the intellectual godfather of these decades, rate a mention. The loss of faith in social science and causal explanations of the social world, that debilitating disease Clifford Geertz has dubbed "epistemological hypochondria," is considered only in passing. The academic heirs of sixties arminianism, the "grammatological Maoism" of Jacques Derrida,and the radical subjectivism of Michel Foucault are nowhere discussed. While considerable attention is lavished on figures from the fifties like the Marxist economists Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, there is no mention of the rise and fall of academic neo-Marxism over the past twenty years. No mention is made of the inverse relationship between the rise of academic radicalism and the decline of left-wing politics. Neither neoliberalism nor Jimmy Carter rates a passing comment.

There is a moment early in the book when Birnbaum seems to question his own assumptions. He writes at the beginning of Chapter Two, "I am aware that I presuppose what a good deal of the analysis in these initial pages so strenuously denies, that there is a public, still. That is also a matter for inquiry." Had he continued along those lines, Birnbaum might have noticed that the fragmentation of his own presentation mirrors the fragmentation of "the left," the honorific entity whose coherence he assumes. But the left/right distinction has long been fundamentally scrambled by libertarian and

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legalitarian offshoots of the 1960s. Is Foucault's critique of even the most benign instruments of collective power left or right wing? Was the defense of madness mounted by radicals left or right wing when it issued in the legal rights of the homeless to freeze to death on the streets of New York if they so chose? Similarly, if one of the heroes of the post-sixties academic left, Jacques Derrida, is right, if grammar is fascist–if, like sheltering the homeless, it is an illicit means of social control, then what becomes of the traditional left-wing values, values I share with Birnbaum, which emphasize shared understandings as the basis of social solidarity?

The wish is clearly father to the thought on these pages. So strongly does Birnbaum want to imagine a coherent "left" that he tells us that the Critical Legal Studies Academics, who insist that law is merely politics, and Ronald Dworkin, who argues that law is the expression of natural rights which exist prior to politics, are really birds of the same feather. Similarly while he speaks repeatedly of the value of citizenship and participation, he also unreservedly endorses the judicial activism which displaces self-government.

The intellectual fragmentation of what Birnbaum nostalgically describes as the left is paralleled by its social fragmentation, another vast topic beyond his ken. The political left, the left that operates on or within the Democratic party, has precious little connection with campus radicalism. The proliferation of specialized scholarly journals–there are now one hundred twenty-six in sociology alone–has allowed would-be radicals to write for one another in the semi-private language of academic jargon. The "leaf-rakers" of the academic left have become a world unto themselves, a world in which one need never write for the "imbeciles" outside the university gates. Those beyond don't seem to much mind, however. A phenomena Birnbaum barely mentions, the think tank, has evolved to supply the political ideas which once came from the academy. The one significant political/intellectual movement within the Democratic party, neoliberalism, came from journalists, not academics.

The Radical Renewal is significant despite its rehash of familiar arguments, because it is part of an emerging genre of books,including Sidney Blumenthal's *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* and Robert McElvaine's *The End of the Conservative Era*, devoted to reviving left-wing fortunes. They are what I call "from '68 to '88 books." They are books which leap from the halcyon days of the sixties to the promise of new glory in the late eighties while saying as little as possible about the interregnum. Like Michael Dukakis, who constantly evoked John Kennedy, they have tried to revive leftism or liberalism without coming to grips with its intellectual and social failures of the past twenty years. If liberalism is to revive without the aid of an economic crash, and for the good of the country, it should, it will do so by

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way of the rethinking *The Radical Renewal* so often exhorts and so rarely exemplifies.

FRED SIEGEL

ON DEREK WALCOTT

THE ARKANSAS TESTAMENT. By Derek Walcott. Farrar Straus & Giroux.$15.95.

Derek Walcott's eighth book of poems, *The Arkansas Testament,* marks a striking change in its author's sensibility. It is a stern, even a stark book, marked by renunciations both in its manner and in its matter, intending in its austerity to brush aside, half in impatience and half in penitence, much of what has distinguished Walcott's earlier poetry, and to put in its place that remorseless clarity with which it holds all things, even its own renunciations, to account.

The book opens with several poems in short-lined quatrains whose terseness is a kind of abnegation, as if the poet wished to refine his way to truth by what he can't help seeing as a sacrifice. These poems are also written in a plainer and more restrained idiom than Walcott has generally employed. He remains learned, mature, and subtle, but he does not concern himself with the breadth of his linguistic range here, neither employing the rich but hermetic high style of "The Castaway" nor the muscular integrity of his dialect poetry.

From his early "Prelude" down to the poems of *Midsummer* (1984), Walcott has inhabited the question of what it is to introduce a land into a written and cosmopolitan poetic culture. To do this is to place the poet in a peculiar position–for such a poet must always speak for a people, yet the act of doing so always threatens to destroy the authenticity of that poet's connection to his or her vitalizing culture. A poet's cultural roots are always vulnerable, especially when that culture is an oppressed one and when the poetry is addressed to an audience that includes in some measure its oppressor. But there is also another and deeper risk in the act of attempting to bring into poetry national experiences which have not been subjects for poetry (at least for cosmopolitan poetry), a risk which inheres not in the poet's particular political situation, but in the very act of naming and stabilizing the unnamed

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and unstable experiences which go into poetry and by means of which a poet hopes to be able to speak for a people.

Derek Walcott is a poet of the West Indies, but his book *The Arkansas Testament* is about being a poet from the West Indies. It is this worry, this problem of conflicting allegiances, which perhaps accounts for the book's prevailing tone of stern clarity. While it is too much to say that Walcott's move from richness to stern simplicity is a move north from an imaginative tropics to an imaginative New England, it is clear that the simplicity of this book is the simplicity of a poet striving to define certain losses resulting from that move and that the thematic burden of this book is the poet's separation from his native land and his early idiom.

The first section of the book is called "Here." There is a self-lacerating quality about that title, since "here" is the poet's native St. Lucia, and the poems, if they were not in fact written "elsewhere," are at least largely about the poet's inability to see St. Lucia any longer as his "here." The return to a vitalizing landscape to which the poet's relations have become vexed is one of the traditional crises of poetry. Ever since "Tintern Abbey" the fear that the poet has betrayed a place to which he or she has had a vital link (or that the place has betrayed the poet) has been among the driving energies of poetry, as if poetry can be written only when all the signs argue that it is no longer possible, as if the reality of that vital link, like Paradise, can be affirmed only once it has been lost.

The deepest and most powerful of the poems of return which make up the first half of the book is "The Light of the World." Like the earlier and more bitter "Homecoming: Anse La Raye" (1969), this is a poem about encountering strangers, for it is in encountering strangers more than in encountering friends that one encounters one's native culture as a whole. The earlier poem is stark: taunting himself with having imagined, like a grade-hungry Afro-Greek, that he would return to his island as Odysseus returned to Ithaca, he depicts himself surrounded by begging children who thought he was a wealthy tourist. "The Light of the World," by contrast, is a poem of tender regret which attests to that love which persists past alienation and even betrayal.

The poem's closing scene is not a rapprochement, not a recovery, but it does affirm about as much as anyone can affirm, that deep ties, no matter how thoroughly compromised, remain ties after all:

> Then, a few yards ahead, the van stopped. A man
> shouted my name from the transport window.
> I walked up towards him. He held out something.

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A pack of cigarettes had dropped from my pocket.
He gave it to me. I turned, hiding my tears.
There was nothing they wanted, nothing I could give them
But this thing I have called "The Light of the World."

The "Elsewhere" section of the book takes us into a colder climate, both poetically and geographically. Many of these poems, especially "Eulogy to W. H. Auden," "Steam," "Elsewhere," and "Central America" have the feel of public occasions, and two poems, "Tomorrow, Tomorrow" and "Fame," deal explicitly with that alienation and rootlessness which are among the burdens of a public career.

The crucial poem in this section is the book's title poem, in which the poet attempts to come to terms with a history very different from the one that has traditionally concerned him. Visiting Fayetteville, Arkansas, the poet wakes before dawn in his motel room and prowls the town in search of coffee. Before he finds his coffee, he brushes up against the still-sharp edges of American racism.

Walcott is particularly acute in registering how that racism tinges moments where it is not the explicit matter. Here, for instance, he describes the icy politeness and constraint caused by his entering a cafeteria:

A tall black cook setting glazed
pies, a beehive-blond waitress,
lips like a burst strawberry
and her "Mornin'" like maple syrup.
Four DEERE caps talking deer hunting.
I looked for my own area.
The muttering decanter
had all I needed; it could sigh for
Sherman's smoking march to Atlanta
or the march to Montgomery.
I was still nothing. A cipher
in its bubbling black zeroes, here.

What finally stands out in this poem is a set of questions which at first appear to be rhetorical ones. Can the poet pledge allegiance to a flag that has been borne by Klansmen? Does the aging Democracy of the United States "remember its log-cabin dream, / the way that a man past fifty / imagines a

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mountain stream?" Will the poet "be a citizen / or an afterthought of the state?" It is sad enough that these questions still have to be asked. It would be worse, as the poet remarks, to pretend that they are all past, so that he could "curse / from the picket lines of my verse / the concept of Apartheid." But that these remain questions, that they haven't already been answered in the negative, that despite the poet's recognition that evil does not end late or soon he nevertheless goes on to imagine how the stars and stripes must heal the stripes and scars, is the sign of a sensibility actively engaged with a history which, for better or for worse, is far from over.

It is this sense that history is not over which links the two sections of the book, for both are the work of a sensibility which even as it searches for clarity recognizes that stories of praise and blame, of betrayal and reconciliation, of hope and anger, rarely do justice by themselves to actual human states of affairs. The maturity of this book, and its humanity also, is its understanding that, clear as we may be about the facts, their meaning remains in the final analysis provisional, something which only our future acts can determine.

JOHN BURT

DOMESTIC MYSTICISM

A HUNGER. By Lucie Brock-Broido. Alfred A. Knopf. $8.95. **THE GOOD THIEF. By Marie Howe.** Persea Books. $9.95.

In the dialogue between the body and the soul the body has, of late, had all the argument on its side. This is particularly true among women poets, for many of whom sexual identity or "gender" (when it includes its psychosocial aura) has seemed most relevant. Of course, "woman" has become so indeterminate a category in contemporary cant that any aspect of identity may be subsumed under it. One challenge for contemporary women poets is to decide just how far they wish "womanhood" to define the terms of their awareness. It is a good sign, I think, that "the soul" has returned with a fresh, contemporary aura, not genderless but metagendered.

The metaphysical impulse arising in, altered and constrained by history and biology runs through many of our best women poets–Dickinson, Moore, Plath, Bishop, Graham. It is particularly strong in two recent first books, Lu-

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cie Brock-Broido's *A Hunger* and Marie Howe's *The Good Thief*. Both poets, like their female precursors, locate the otherworldly within the domestic rather than at some exalted margin to which only poets are privy. The uncanny, that sense of strangeness in familiar things and familiarity in strange things, is their primary affect. For each, the self is divided, in the world but not entirely of it, alternately exalted and terrified by its estrangement.

A Hunger introduces a prodigious and ambitious talent. Lucie Brock-Broido has chosen not to limit herself to the personal confession, anecdote or scenic meditation which so dominated and limited poetry for a time. She is interested in archaeology, evolution, incarnation, in medieval history and in the latest news headline, while remaining close to the subjective and spiritual center of the lyric. Her imagination reaches back to primordial being and forward to millenia, in and out of the womb and grave and beyond these to the "grand perhaps." It inhabits the most alien personae, particularly those of historical children with marginal lives (Birdie Africa, survivor of the "MOVE" fire in Philadelphia; child-king Edward VI; Jessica McClure, who was trapped in a well for three days; June Gibbons of the criminal "elective mute" twins made famous by journalist Marjorie Wallace). In another poet these appropriations might seem docu-melodrama. But Brock-Broido does not pretend to speak for her characters, to represent them journalistically, or to offer moral history lessons. The historical reality of these figures, empirical details of their experience and even testimony, is important as evidence that boundaries have been crossed, that unknown territories really have been felt within the human soul and are not merely a product of rhetoric. By choosing to inhabit largely inarticulate or mute characters she avoids the barriers of cliché which language erects against strangeness. And she gains the opportunity to interpret that strangeness in accord with her own uncompromising vision. That vision is often concerned with gender–with the struggle of the immature mind to absorb the powerful meanings of mother, father, female, male. But these problems arise from the larger struggle of the soul to inhabit the social and physical body. One feels that the vision of these poems, which demonstrate the "mystic streak" throughout, is not gender-bound. The author is a chameleon poet whose "autobiography" consists less of living than of watching, listening and "getting it down."

Among the concerns of *A Hunger* is that "magnum mysterium," the future, the soul's journey and destiny imagined in terms of incarnation, evolution, maturation, vocation, and especially travel. The opening poem (from which my title is taken) introduces us immediately to the linguistic nerve, tough music, imagistic density and imaginative reach of this poet. The poem speaks as the disembodied voice of an Emily Dickinson or a Charlotte Brontë, threatening return:

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> In thrice 10,000 seasons, I will come back to this world
> In a white cotton dress. Kingdom of After My Own Heart.
> Kingdom of Fragile. Kingdom of Dwarves. When I come home,
> Teacups will quiver in their Dresden saucers, pentatonic chimes
> Will move in wind. A covy of alley cats will swarm on the side
> Porch & perch there, portents with quickened heartbeats
> You will feel against your ankles as you pass through.

This way of being inside and outside experience may account for Brock-Broido's interest in characters whose fate has been chronicled or distorted by the media. These poems reclaim the soul–unformed, tragic, violent, anxious though it may be–from media-hype, from what Dickinson called "auction," what Plath called "the peanut crunching crowd." In this Brock-Broido is at once postmodern (making her poems from the fragments of a culture lost in celluloid and kitsch) and classical (insistent on the meaningfulness of the category "soul").

Brock-Broido reminds us repeatedly that hers is a "mid-Western" and "anorexic" soul. The sense of a center or interior she associates, often, with places of origin and with the past. But the poems remind us that we cannot live there, that we belong to history and biology. The Plath-inspired "Jessica, from the Well" imagines the child's semi-entombment as a grotesque return to a fetal condition. The poet involves us in the physical details of this entrapment as a metaphor of interiority. She explores a presocial, even prehuman loneliness, at first relished: "I slipped down / the shaft like the small mythic creature / I have always known I ought to be." But such an anorexic dream gives way to the fact of the body, of growth and vitality, and of community. Ambivalent as she is about "the Sweethearts and Insomniacs" who address her above the well, she joins them, accepting their imperative to sing, but dignifying the song to something more than mimicry. She is born from the well "a Jessica," still a recalcitrant soul, but part of the human world. Anorexia has been called the female disease, and in "Jessica" and some other poems the alienation from the body may be connected to gender, but for Brock-Broido gender is only a condition of vision, not a determinant or goal of vision. If mysticism has historically appealed more to women than to men, she does not define it as an inherently female state.

Brock-Broido is a gothic metaphysician who confronts the perils of the imagination, the demonic aspect of the spirit that can destroy the self and others. The terrible story of the "elective mute" June Gibbons unfolds in

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journal form; we learn from the inside about her emotional enslavement to her sister (her "secret self"), of their fascination with arson and their bizarre "register of deaths of dolls," of their voyeuristic sexual adventures. Their passionate, wildly ambivalent relationship develops around a deranged parody and defiance of the social world. In "I Wish You Love" the poet again combines bone and fire, weaving "Josef Megele's skull ascending" and other grotesques into Dietrich's torch-song "I wish you shelter / from the storm, A cozy fire to keep you warm." But the poem is not about Mengele or Dietrich; they represent antithetical but perversely connected kinds of imagination. And they are brought into relation with the poet's own sentiments, her preoccupation with loss, her unwillingness to succumb to sentimentality or morbidity. The poem recalls Eliot in its juxtaposition of grotesque imagery ("by nightfall, the eels will be floating face up toward Germany") and tawdry romance ("I'm the kind of girl who calls from baths in old extravagant hotels"). But bleak as the world looks before this unflinching gaze, it is not abandoned for oblivion. The poem ends in a clear-eyed,if sinister directive: "Now Dietrich's dead, we turn left here."

The poet draws inspiration from successful souls as well, those of Keats and Rabelais in particular. "Ten Years Apprenticeship in Fantasy" offers a state of luminosity less morbid than that in "I Wish You Love." But "fantasy" means holding the world back. It does not mean make-believe. This prose-poem in the form of a letter already assumes the need of an other, an external anchor, a prose tension in the hermetic world of the spirit. The poem emphasizes this dialectic and its extremes. The letter is written from an interiorized space bordered by snowstorms and darkness but still defined in relation to an external nature and culture it observes and needs. While she explores the various stages and dimensions of her darkness in the most dispassionate voice, a certain terror pulses within it. In one of the few clearly feminist moments in the book, the poet describes fatal concavity:

> In closing, let me remind you of the Siamese twins separated not long ago in Canada. They let the little one, the concave half, be girl. Without her, he will skip quicker, eat more heartily, raise up his own kind & I think he should be given that one good chance. What better reason to go on living than to repeat yourself autobiographically? She didn't have that chance you understand.

But the twins do not separate in the speaker. "My Darling C" may be a lover, but it is surely also an aspect of herself, one she cannot relinquish. She reminds him to keep up his nourishment and "stay up all night if you

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have to, to avoid bad dreaming. It can hurt you & I need you."

The power of these closing poems is their honest scrutiny of dangerous obsessions and unwillingness to sentimentalize alternatives. Brock-Broido's poems never become paralyzed in irony or despair. More than Dickinson's or Plath's, they insist that the soul retain its connection to life. The driving force behind these poems–in their tightly synapsed images, their often lashing diction, their relentlessly sustained or brutally clipped sentences, their brilliant timing–is the pressure of truth telling, of resistance to quick fixes and simple stances, to all forms of escapism.

Two kinds of spirituality characterize Marie Howe's poetry. One is demonic and exuberant, the other is compassionate and sober. One is Romantic, the other is Biblical. One accents gender awareness, the other transcends it. She has mastered both, but the latter is more compelling and more original.

Howe is interested in those intimations of spiritual and metaphysical being which arise within ordinary domestic experience. She writes of obsession and possession, as in "What the Angels Left." These angels recall Rilke's, but even more those in Adrienne Rich's "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" who taunt the neurotic housewife. But Howe's angels, more a product of rhetoric than of visionary neurosis, have a certain lower-order charm, like that of Pope's sylphs. While Howe remains straightfaced throughout her testimony, one senses a curl at the corner of the mouth, an awareness that domestic mysticism can seem absurd. Too often, though, Howe loses this salutary irony and yields to twilight-zone contrivances. "Sometimes, in rain, there is an extra drumming, / and it's them..."; "the shadows have come back, circling the room like headlights." Howe depicts herself melodramatically drawn away from this world (both of domestic chores and human intimacy) toward some otherworldly power or voice which she can never quite grasp:

> Understand, I love you, even as I turn from you like this
> stumbling breathless down a dim and disappearing street behind
> a man who squints at house numbers, bewildered, about to say
> something I can almost hear.

Sexuality–tumid, passionate, violent, beastly, ecstatic–dominates the terms of experience in *The Good Thief*, as in much recent poetry by women. Sometimes it is mystical and self-transcending; other times it stands in

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antithesis to spirituality. We are confused, then, about just how this poet sees the relation between body and soul. The volume opens on the old trope of sex and death, with a Beckett-styled inversion that makes death the tenor. "It will take you / as you like it best, hard and fast as a slap across your face, / or so sweet and slow you'll scream give it to me give it to me until it does." The poem swerves rather close to lurid fantasy, threatening to invert the metaphor again. What saves it, once again, is a well-timed smirk, an interlude or prepubescent images which cut the high-drama with self-amusement: "Nothing will ever clench this hard. / At last (the little girls are clapping, shouting) someone has pulled / the drawstring of your gym bag closed enough and tight. / At last // someone has knotted the lace of your shoe so it won't ever come undone."

But Howe's best poems refuse to make the body the measure of the soul. When she moves outside her subjective vision to meditate upon great, mythic moments, she is able to telescope a diversity of images into a unified spiritual concept. The fall of Eve is such a moment, recorded in the prose poem, "Part of Eve's Discussion." In a long, periodic sentence loading simile upon simile she expands and particularizes our understanding of a subject that has no literal name. "It was like the moment when a bird decides not to eat from your hand, and flies, just before it flies, the moment the rivers seem to still and stop because a storm is coming, but there is no storm..."

Howe underemploys not only her talent for dramatic compression, but for aphorism, paradox, antithesis, proverb, those means of conceptual compression. But she is clearly drawn to the Biblical parables and gospels and makes good use of them in "Isaac," "Retribution," "The Unforgiven," and elsewhere. "Without Devotion" presents spirituality not in terms of demonic possession but in terms of faith and charity. Howe may well have a career as a poet of spiritual instruction, along the lines of Ezra Pound but without his hieroglyphic:

> Cut loose, without devotion, a man becomes a comic.
> His antics are passed
> around the family table and mimicked so well, years
> later and the family still laughs.
> Without devotion, any life becomes a stranger's story
> told and told again to help another sleep
> or live.

Poems such as this one inspire confidence. This poet may be, after all, a

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good thief. She has stolen from domesticity not only the trappings of mysticism but the wisdom of experience.

BONNIE COSTELLO

PLEASURES OF RESTRICTION

HAPPY HOUR By Alan Shapiro. University of Chicago Press. $16.00.
SAPPHICS AGAINST ANGER AND OTHER POEMS. By Timothy Steele. Random House. $12.95.
THE GOLDEN GATE: A NOVEL. By Vikram Seth. Random House. $17.95.

The so-called "new formalism" that has recently been attributed to some younger poets is hardly new. Throughout this century, alongside the tradition-makers of the modern–Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. C. Williams–such poets as Robert Frost, Louise Bogan, and J. V. Cunningham wrote metrical poetry. Rather than representing a revived fashion, poets who write in form today share the ripening pleasures of restriction. This is especially true of Alan Shapiro, Timothy Steele, and Vikram Seth.

In a recent article, Alan Shapiro has defended meter against what he sees as a "vogue" of bad metrical verse, arguing that the wider the range of forms available to poets, "the more enriched, more flexible and inclusive our expressive resources will be." Indeed, Shapiro in his latest book, *Happy Hour*, leans away from the iambic line that dominated his earlier books, and tends towards forms ranging from free to accentual verse to iambic pentameter quatrains bound by half-rhymes. In subject matter, a backward, deepening chronological movement shapes the book, shifting from the speaker's emotional encounters in adulthood to his childhood relationship to his parents, and from the filial view to a portrait of the parents' marriage. Although many poems in *Happy Hour* resemble in their themes those in Shapiro's earlier book, *The Courtesy*, the recent poems tend to be more explicitly narrative rather than epigrammatically witty, as well as more ironic and looser metrically.

Anxiety of psyche and spirit, Shapiro's previous subject, here develops into obsession. This book's speaker is obsessed with punishment's erotic pain.

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Repeated words or phrases come to represent the repeated behavior for which the speaker is punished or punishes himself. "Bad boy, you'll learn your lesson–" the boy tells the rabbit he is torturing in "Other Hands" ; in "The Riddle," the boy hears his mother "saying / over and over that he's a bad boy" and makes his toy soldier "run / again like punishment against her, and again be punished / over and over for the bad thing he is about to do."

Such obsession is externalized in "Neighbors" –a sequence of ten poems about a young couple living upstairs from a disturbed woman who repeatedly plays the same record. The music expressing this woman's unfulfilled desires, violates the optimism of the couple, upon whom the neighbor spies as they kiss goodbye in the morning and to whom she listens as they make love at night. Living her desperate, messy life, this neighbor with her song of ideal desire comes to epitomize the very problems of maintaining a love relationship, while the couple, "the nice people no one / would look twice at on the street" become through their counter-voyeurism implicated in both the humanity and the madness of their neighbor:

> the way she wildly looked around
> when the car lights slashed across
> her chafed arms, her wet nightgown,
> her suffering unhoused, exposed
> to anybody's eyes. And we thought about
> our urge to go on watching.

Neither sentimental nor judgmental, Shapiro plays skillfully on the sordid delusions and desirous expectations of contemporary America.

The dangers of such obsessions (compulsive drinking, compulsive buying) within a marriage lies at the center of Shapiro's strongest poems, even in the lovely "Blue Vase," in which the speaker attempts to commence a happier relationship for himself. Observing his partner as she sews their bedroom curtains, the speaker takes stock of his possessions, including the "small blue vase my ex-wife left / behind so many months ago." He realizes, ambivalently, that he has arrived fully into the present. Yet the last lines suggest how he will struggle to keep his new life amid these beautiful things beyond the range of his obsessions; he helplessly holds "the plentiful bright cloth above the floor / it grazes now, no matter what I do."

Like Shapiro, Timothy Steele uses the ordering of language to contain the uncontrollable forces of emotional life. For Steele, though, the measured line is the basis of beauty, and aesthetic sensibility a presence as powerful as other people. In "From a Rooftop," the view leads the poet at dawn to contemplate beneath him the serene orderliness of the city, apparently empty of

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human life. Its perceived beauty measures the values that become referents of the graph within which Steele's poems operate. Human things–the "shelves" and "surfaces" of rooftops or the "wide blocks of white" sheets hung out to dry–mediate between earth and the morning star. The subject here is not so much the psyche as the moral, social, and aesthetic order within which the psyche operates.

Steele's formal range is impressive. Each poem works in a different stanza. These include six-line rhymed iambic pentameters, five-line stanzas of four tetrameter and one trimeter lines, short accentual lines, seven-line unrhymed stanzas, and the complex rhythm of the unrhymed Sapphic stanza. Rather than dramatic monologues or narratives, Steele more often writes meditations. Their subjects, evoked in exquisite imagery, are entryways to noumena, the pure abstractions of the mind.

In the book's title poem, "Sapphics Against Anger," the value of measure shifts from the purely aesthetic to the moral. The very title recalls the invention of that stanza by Sappho, and the long line of continuity, from the Greek, through the Latin of Catullus and Horace and into the European languages during the Renaissance and Victorian eras, up to Ezra Pound. By placing Sapphics in opposition to anger, Steele dramatizes the value that restraint imposes upon a poet's experience. The happenstance of common anger is set in the context of the poet's "learning." As he summons Aristotle, Virgil, and Dante, he hopes that their collective wisdom will keep him from giving vent to anger, which does not "Release it but" makes one "to be increasingly prone / To its incursions." Addressing Dante, Steele's Virgil describes the speaker with sly humor:

> "That fellow, at the slightest provocation
> Slammed phone receivers down, and waved his arms like
> A madman. What Attila did to Europe,
> What Genghis Khan did
>
> To Asia, that poor dope did to his marriage."

Although stylized, this poem, unlike the sin of melancholy, is hardly "Stylish at present." It parodies melancholic and aggrandizing heroics of the self. But Steele is serious about applying the classics to the most contemporary of domestic spats, for the speaker learns:

> Better than rage is the post-dinner quiet,
> The sink's warm turbulence, the streaming platters,
> The suds rehearsing down the drain in spirals

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In the last rinsing.

The simple act of washing dishes becomes here emblematic of "the good life," which is "Conducted thoughtfully." After all, "passion" is "...the holiest of powers, sustaining / Only if mastered."

Some critics have found Steele's poetry too moralizing and abstract, but they overlook the fanciful, self-mocking poems, such as "Chanson Philosophique," in which the argument between the nominalist and the realist cohabiting in a lyric poet is resolved in paradox:

My life's a nominal/real dispute,
Which leaves identity clear and blurred,
In which what happens has occurred
Often and never...

They also neglect to consider Steele's skill at handling imagery, in lines like these that describe sparrows as they "spurt up to / And through the lozenges of space" of a chain link fence. In "At Will Rogers Beach," the poet "translates" a momentary perception into the form and substance of language, reversing the motion of the roller-skaters:

One of them coasts upright, visoring a hand
To the sun's afterglow, while, smooth performers,
Two others click past a closed hot-dog stand,
She in a T-shirt, shorts, tights, and leg-warmers,
He in light gym trunks and a netted top;
And where the long wide pavement curves, they drop
Into a slight crouch and accelerate,
Cross-stepping, their arms swinging left and right,
Translating into speed their form and weight
And dwindling, as they sweep off, into night.

For Steele, form and articulation are ultimately the only response to the chaos of half-consciousness. In "Toward Calgary," the "Needless invention, needless thrift" of the oxymoronic "prudent heart" (that restrained seat of the passions) are themselves chastened by the huge sky, "an inclusive drift / Of radiance." For Steele, then, the value of measured verse itself is determined by what cannot be measured.

Vikram Seth's verse novel, *The Golden Gate,* touches upon the same issues of measure and passion as Shapiro's narrative poems and Steele's lyric meditations, but is at once a comedy of manners, or of Bay Area yuppie

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mannerisms, and an ornate tetrameter sonnet sequence. A hybrid of genres, it marries Pushkin to the Indian epic tradition, which itself was influenced by the English Romantic poets. The novel's form embodies the tension between narrative sweeping forward and each stanza's reflexive self-enclosure. Seth's poem is unabashedly not in the plain style of Shapiro and Steele. More self-consciously "literary," more shamelessly "contemporary" and "fashionable," it nonetheless shares with the others a concern with limits.

Such limits are initially set by the lively voice of the narrator, who censors the excesses of the passion of the lovers John and Elizabeth:

> Judged by these artless serfs of Cupid,
> Love is not blind but, rather, dumb.
> Their babblings daily grow more stupid.
> I am embarrassed for them...

By addressing the reader directly here, and in subsequent lines bringing "this text" into the poem, Seth constantly draws attention to the artistry of authorship; he almost never allows the mimetic reality of the story to overwhelm the artful voice telling it. Yet by combining the feel of the postmodern (as in Italo Calvino) and of the eighteenth century (Henry Fielding, for example), the poem works so well as narrative fiction that the reader almost forgets he or she is reading sonnets. Dialogue becomes super-realistic; colloquial American speech is set into Pushkin's stanzas, as in the quarrel between the lovers about Liz's resentful, "senescent, enuretic" cat:

> ...John stops as Liz stares wildly
> At his flushed face. She turns to go,
> Then, turning back, exclaims, 'You know,
> He's always acted pretty mildly
> Before you first moved in with me...'
> 'I see.' 'You don't see.' 'Yes I see.'

With sheer inventiveness, Seth plays against the boundaries of American idiom and poetic diction. In a single stanza, the narrator describes popcorn in terms of its "crackling fissiparity" ; then the characters eat it speaking echt California slang:

> ...Whoa! It's hot
> –You're right–but really hits the spot...

Seth even makes his characters into wordsmiths. (None of them are

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authors except for Seth's alter ego, the acronymic economist Kim Tarvesh, who broods at parties over his unfinished doctoral dissertation.) Phil, the antinuclear activist, telling Liz, the lawyer, about his ten days in prison, invents a verb, "to consense" from "consensus," to complete the rhyme scheme of his speech.

While verbal ingenuity is charming, some of the cleverness begins to wear thin on second reading. At worst, the rhymes become strained. But Seth's is a virtuoso performance: he writes lovers' dialogues, a sculptor's interior monologue, sermons, professional conversations of wine-makers, attorneys, and a rock band (called Liquid Sheep), and even a bedtime story. He can make rhyme schemes enhance the details of realism, rhyming "San Francisco Chronicle" with "ironical."

Seth himself perceives the problems this form can create and defends his choice of the strict stanza on the principle of pleasure, not the morality of measure. He explicitly refuses to legitimate "this stanza... / These feminine rhymes" : "The truth is, I can't justify it. / ...I may as well have fun and try it." But he adds, on a half-serious note:

> Why, asks a friend, attempt tetrameter?
> Because it once was noble, yet
> Capers before the proud pentameter,
> Tyrant of English...

Although Seth fights one poetic convention with another, his characters struggle with conventions of behavior and belief. Phil abandons his high-tech professionalism for the battle against nuclear weaponry. Ed, Phil's lover and Liz's brother, subverts his homosexuality with his unbending Catholic guilt, while Father O'Hare, who sermonizes at the anti-nuke protest, uses Catholicism to justify civil disobedience. Liz marries and becomes pregnant as a tribute to her dying mother's values. John, successful, finicky, and smug, finds love an acquisition dearer than he expects. Yet The Golden Gate reverses the imitative fallacy. By tying up the amorous loose ends of 1980s California into an archaic stanza, Seth artfully if ironically validates the artifice of poetry. Like Shapiro and Steele, Seth attends to verse form not to participate in a "new formalism" but to engage with the materials, and the matter, of poetry.

KATHRYN HELLERSTEIN

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MOTHER'S CURSE

ROPE-DANCER. By M. J. Fitzgerald. Random House. $115.95.
CONCERTINA. By M. J. Fitzgerald. Random House. $15.95.
ANYWHERE BUT HERE. By Mona Simpson.
Random House. $6.95.
SECOND SIGHT. By Mary Tannen. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95.

In all these first novels (except for *Rope-Dancer*, a short-story collection) by women,the sins of mothers–and their sorrows–are visited upon their children. Each female protagonist has to escape her mother's power in order to discover her own. But that struggle necessarily involves, as each woman faces maturity herself, some conflicted understanding of her mother's sufferings and mistakes. Ambivalence about the past runs deep in these narratives and adulterates the women's achievement of selfhood.

M. J. Fitzgerald's *Rope-Dancer*, however, does not fit this scheme, being more concerned with women's present love affairs, many of which are defined as mythic female-victim stories. In "Creases," a man packs his pliant lover away in a box when he gets tired of her. In "Perspective on the First You," the older man with whom the narrator falls in love can't breathe with her there; she can't breathe without him. Not being able to breathe becomes the motif of "Phebican" (a name short for Penelope Helen Eve Beatrice I Circe Albertine Nausicaa) who goes through life with a lead ball pressing down upon her shoulders and chest. These relentlessly symbolic stories about women tortured by puerile and faceless men are tiresome.

Some stories in this collection are more satisfying when Fitzgerald takes time to develop her situation a bit. But even in her more complex plots, for example "The Fire Eater," which describes a lonely woman falling in love with a street performer in Rome, the narrator spoils the effect by intervening obsessively to comment on her own telling of the story, on the writer-reader power struggle: "now we know what happens, can I wield enough power to keep you turning the pages if I keep talking instead of getting on with the story?" Fitzgerald's attempts at making relationships and language reflect meaningfully upon each other sometimes work–there are brilliant and precise passages of writing–but the overall effect is, even in the more interesting

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stories, contrived and hermetic.

Fitzgerald's *Concertina* avoids the overtly mythic strains of *Rope-Dancer*, aiming for a more straightforward reflection on the life of the main character, Coriola, from birth to death. But the accelerating complexity of relationships and events and Coriola's shifting places in her own life (narrating from a perspective of age three, sixteen, forty, seventy-five) undermine any linear or realistic psychobiographical scheme. The author seems to want to pack in as many significant adversities as she can. These move from the hazards of growing up–anorexia, therapy, dancing in strip joints, unsuccessful love affairs–to, finally, multiple instances of incest which eventually produce an almost comic effect. Fitzgerald wants to suggest an organic metaphor, the generations timelessly extending and twisting themselves around each other, incestuous vines. She wants to show how Coriola's mother's original sin–the incest but also her repression of Coriola–has poisoned Coriola's life. Indeed Coriola's life and her narration of it fail to break the cycle of generational errors, fail to take the mother's powers into her own hands. Coriola can't grow up.

But it's really Coriola's excessive literariness, her brooding over words and symbolic patterns, that damage her most. Mona Simpson's *Anywhere But Here* unfolds a destructive mother-daughter relationship too, but Ann August, the daughter suffering from the curse of her mother's possessive neurosis, does grow up, and her struggle takes place in a more familiar and realistic terrain than Coriola's. In spite of some technical lapses, the novel achieves and sustains one remarkable effect: Ann's ambivalence about her mother Adele, whose craziness is only gradually and partially revealed, remains taut throughout the book. Adele's power over Ann, who cannot stop loving her, remains in force until just before the end, sustaining the novel's tensions.

The technical problems in the book have to do partly with structure, partly with voice. Structurally the book is lopsided, with all the excitement in the first half. The sections where Adele and Ann travel to California to find stardom in Hollywood have the vagrant excitement of a female *On the Road*. But in the second half, when Ann engages in a protracted adolescent struggle with her mother, the novel slows down. The second difficulty, that of voice, affects the narrative's authenticity. Although several women narrate the book along with Ann–her grandmother, aunt, and mother–the only voice that rings true is Ann's. Simpson seems to suggest that Ann is interviewing her relatives, writing a roots book, instead of letting the characters live.

The title comes from Emerson: "There are three wants which can never be satisfied; that of the rich wanting more, that of the sick, wanting something different, and that of the traveler, who says, 'anywhere but here'." In some ways, Simpson makes Adele a female incarnation of the American

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spirit, infused with Emersonian optimism and drive. But at the same time Adele is a compulsive consumer of tired ideas, and if she represents an American spirit, it's the desire to shop around. As far as Simpson takes this notion–that is, to the gulches of Los Angeles–it gives the novel a certain cultural perspective. But the problem for both Ann and *Anywhere But Here* is that there isn't much world outside the two main characters. Ann has nowhere to turn for help. There are no effectual or reliable men in the book, nor is there a larger social structure, except the distant world of college and independence. Ann and Adele live in a car; they are unbearably isolated from others and dependent upon each other.

It is a relief to move from such private narratives to the more generous world of *Second Sight*. Whereas Simpson and Fitzgerald endow certain characters with tremendous power, Tannen places her rather weaker characters against a background of forces greater than themselves. In fact, Tannen's characters find strength only when they, consciously or not, give in to these forces. The main character Delia uses her second sight to find and draw to her the right man; the outsider William combines historical research with his investigations into a family curse, partly to find out the truth about the past but also to relieve his anxieties about himself. Characters are drawn to each other by the invisible forces of history, family connection, and past events; there is a logic to these coincidences but also a magic.

As in Simpson's and Fitzgerald's books, a maternal curse descends from an abused and weak-minded ancestress, Anna Bird. Anna's curse is rather different from those in Fitzgerald's and Simpson's work in that it is generalized, directed not at one daughter but at many generations. It represents all the wrongs of the past rather than one particular neurosis. In a sense, then, it offers an opportunity for action and redress. Because it is Gothic, magic, and outlandish, it paradoxically helps the modern generation out of its predicament. For Anna's curse supplies a model of the power of the weak against the strong: superstition, magic, and nature against money, politics, and industry. As inheritors of the curse, Delia and William use it to combat the strong characters in the novel–not through confrontation but by going around them, drawing their strength to them, waiting for propitious moments when they can act.

Whereas Fitzgerald and Simpson are looking at the psychological roots of feminine power–in the family, in experience, in the maturing identity–Tannen examines its cultural base. Tannen sees power coming from its ancient, traditional sources–nature, ritual, magic, the body–rather than something discovered in the self. Ann and Coriola, with their histories of abuse and neglect, distrust men and look inward for strength. Tannen's women look outward. They do their work, worry about their children, carry on without a

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lot of self-examination. Their power does not exist in isolation from or at the expense of male presence. Whereas Ann and Adele want to get anywhere but here, to escape the burdens of their own guilt and helplessness, and Coriola cuts herself off from everything except her own memories, perceptions, and passions, Tannen's women and men find themselves so involved with each other and the world around them that their private burdens are somehow shared with and diffused among others. They survive the curses of the past by embracing the present.

WYN KELLEY

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

As a student interested in the current critical theories that have contested the canon, I must take issue with your "Comment" ("Further Notes Toward a Definition of the Canon and the Curriculum," (*PR* 2, 1989).

In your first point, the argument "a recognition of legitimate disagreements does not preclude objections to illegitimate positions based on factional and political interests" presupposes that "legitimate disagreements" are apolitical. But they are not. Whether one intends it or not, a scholastic disagreement often has political ramifications and only the naive or the crafty use scholarliness as an excuse to evade the political consequences of their work. As many have argued (I refer you to Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*), there is no neutrality that, in the end, does not promote a side.

In the second point, the argument "the texts they [feminists, third-worlders, blacks, gays, and left-wingers] would like to substitute for the classics have not been selected by a consensus of the literary and intellectual community" assumes that all challenges to the canon have come from outside this community. But that some of these challenges have come from some of the most prestigious members of the academic community attests to the fact that this is not the case. In fact, the absence of a consensus is, if anything, a healthy and democratic process a long time coming.

In the third point, I think Mr. Phillips correct in describing the creation of a canon as a complicated process that is not so easily pegged by the "current fashionable notion that [the canon] has been chosen by white, male, Christian, Western elitists." There is an elitism operating, but it is of a more subtle nature, masked by an erroneous and rather presumptuous faith in our critical abilities. Different cultures, races, genders, and religions generate different systems of symbolic representation that emphasize different values. As a result, the political concerns that inform "marginal" works complicate their interpretation and evaluation by "outsiders." Perceptual codes, structured by our respective environments create critical blindspots that, in cutting across lines of race, religion and gender, unfortunately create inequities that reflect the social positions of these groupings.

Thus, outside of economic, legal and social constraints that have reduced the number of great works that could have been written by these "marginal" groups (black and female, in particular), many classics are what they are because those who determine what are classics cannot understand those which aren't, but could be. Thus, the importance of feminist critics like Annette Kolodney, Susan Gubar, and Sandra Gilbert; of black critics such as Arnold Rampersad and Louis Gates; of black feminist critics like Barbara

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Johnson and Angela Davis; even of Harold Bloom, whose own revision involved restoring the reputation of the Romantic poets at the expense of the anti-Semitic modernists–all of whom, I would add, are certainly part of the aforementioned "literary and intellectual community" so obviously in consensus.

Despite these disagreements, I do agree that wholesale substitution of Western classics with other, lesser known works is, indeed, questionable; but the more reasonable of us argue that what is needed is supplementation, not substitution. Perhaps, in the past, many could have lived on Great Books alone, but not anymore as mass education has become a reality. Unfortunately, given the restraints of time, supplementation does mean that some standard Western classics would have to go, and I would rather sacrifice a few such works (while retaining others) to promote a thoughtful pluralism than keep out these currently "marginal" works at any cost just to maintain a tradition that will become further and further out of step with my future students' needs.

Lastly, the assertion that "the pluralism advocated by the radicals has more to do with the academic pursuit of their own interests than with educating the enormous variety of students created by undifferentiated mass education" is a gross overstatement. There are just as many who really do care about students' interests as there are those pursuing their own careers in their advocation of pluralism. If you don't believe me, ask the adjuncts who have given up using the Norton Anthology to instruct New York's City College students. Believe me, they have no reputational axe to grind.

The more intelligent recognize that the convergence of career and student needs meet at the point of marketability. The much-bemoaned revisionism would not be so "in vogue" if it were not for market forces responding to an obvious desire or need for such reading matter. Do you think the ever-growing number of homosexual students will continue to be interested in a canon much of whose literature concentrates on heterosexual relations?

In the end, perhaps the real difference between those representing "special" interests and those representing "scholarly" ones is that the former are willing to admit the human basis of their choices, while the latter are constantly taking recourse to some farfetched objectivity, which whether true or not, often serves as an excuse to avoid looking at the political consequences of their arguments.

Bennett Graff
New York

William Phillips replies:

Unfortunately, Mr. Graff repeats the arguments of the revisionists, which, as I indicated, distort the history of Western literature, twist the purposes of education, and represent political rather than literary concerns. But to answer his specific points:

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1. Mr. Graff blurs the distinction between academic and literary interests, a distinction I was at some pains to make. Also, not all literary judgements are political. The revisionists take this line to justify their own political interventions. I might add that Terry Eagleton, who plies his own brand of Marxism, is scarcely an authority in these matters.

2. Here again the academic community is confused with the literary one. And the pejorative use of the term "elitism" confuses the issue. The fact is that our literary and cultural tradition was created by the outstanding minds and talents of our society.

Obviously there are other currents and other cultures, which can be examined from a sociological and historical point of view. But these are not substitutes for the tradition that writers build on.

3. Harold Bloom's interest in the Romantics is an incident in the frequent shifts of sensibility within the tradition.

4. The idea of serving students' needs begs the question of the aims of education, as does the notion of pluralism. What are these needs, if not to learn the heritage of our civilization, unless one is talking about vocational and political needs?

5. The point I made about the revisions in the curriculum having to do with academic interests and careers was not intended to deny that many teachers are dedicated and believe in what they are doing.

6. As for the market forces supporting the new ideologies, that is hardly a recommendation. It is one more sign of the commercialization of new ideological trends.

In the end, Mr. Graff again substitutes scholarly interests for literary trends, which obscures my main point–that literary history has not been written by academics and scholars, whose role always has been to teach and to do research within the boundaries of the accepted tradition. That history has been determined by writers and literary critics.

William Phillips
Boston

To the Editor:

Thank you for the issue of *Partisan Review* with your report on the A. I. H. P. Convention in Vienna last July.(*PR* 1, 1989). Because at that time I had to be in the hospital, I can judge the accuracy of your report only by what you wrote about my paper and that of Dr. Leupold-Lowenthal. I found what you wrote absolutely accurate and conclude from this to the other papers.

All the greater is my distress that your report includes cliches about Vienna and Austria, which I must strongly contradict. You state that "even the average Viennese has accepted the existence of the unconscious, although he has remained anti-Semitic." In Vienna and Austria as a whole the unconscious is not accepted, and anti-Semitism is no longer the prevalent attitude. The most recent polls have clearly shown that it is rapidly disappearing among young people and that it exists amongst perhaps twenty-five

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percent of the older uneducated people. The same figure is reported for the United States and certainly for France. To speak of a "virulent anti-Semitism as great as in 1938" is absurd. Either you were not present in 1938, but I think you were, or you spoke with a few anti-Austrian intellectuals in Vienna who find it fashionable to cover up their own blindness towards Stalinism by accusing others of anti-Semitism. It is especially noteworthy that the anti-Semitism so rampant among academicians, intellectuals, and politicians in the thirties is disappearing. Whenever a public figure makes an anti-Semitic remark, and that happens of course, he must resign. You state the opposite, and I hope that you will use different informants on your next visit to Vienna. To cite examples of the changes in the Austrians' attitudes since 1938 would require too long a letter, but I wish you would look at the problem of anti-Semitism in a more differentiated way. For instance, social psychologists know that about twenty-five percent of the people of the Western world are anti-Semitic–an irrational prejudice created by Christian upbringing. And I hope that the deeply rooted antagonism in the United States against everything Austrian, which derives from the days of the War of Independence, will slowly be buried.

Ernst Federn
Wien, Austria

Edith Kurzweil replies:

Where did Mr. Federn get the idea that Americans hate Austrians? Is he unaware of the fact that Americans love Vienna, with its pastries, fin-de-siècle architecture, its museums; that they prefer to ignore anti-Semitism? Does Mr. Federn really believe that my own contacts in Vienna are so selective that I encounter only ex-Stalinist intellectuals and people among "the twenty-five percent of the older generation who still are anti-Semites?" I can understand Mr. Federn wanting to put Austria in a better light and would want to do so myself, but not at the expense of ignoring the facts. Whether or not anti-Semitism is rampant elsewhere, and what forms it may or may not take, does not alter Austrian reality–even if it has been changing slowly, enought of it remains to have become a cliché.

Anyway, I am glad Mr. Federn liked the rest of my report.

Edith Kurzweil
Boston

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Index to Volume LVI

ABEL, Lionel: The Hero of Metatheater, II, 214; Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 187

ACKERMAN, Stephen: Nets, (poem), III, 450

AESCHLIMAN, Michael D: (BR) The Selected Letters of Mark Van Doren edited with an introduction by George Hendrick, II 305

AGENA, Kay: An Interview with Hernando de Soto, II, 237

ALTER, Robert: On S.Y. Agnon. IV, 620

BARANCZAK, Stanislaw: Witold Gombrowicz: Culture and Chaos, I, 85

BIRKERTS, Sven: (br) Reading America: Essays on American Literature by Denis Donoghue, III 495

BOGEN, Don: Three Cradle Songs, (poem), III, 455

BREINER, Laurence: (br) X/Self by Edward Brathwaite, II, 317; In the Great Rift Valley, (poem), III, 456

BURT, John: (br) The Arkansas Testiment by Derek Walcott, IV, 696

CALHOUN, Craig: The Students of Beijing, IV, 563

CHIN, Han-ping: A Fountain Pen, (story), III, 425

COLIN, Cynthia: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 186

COLLIER, Michael: The Cave, (poem), III, 446

COSTELLO, Bonnie: (br) A Hunger by Lucie Brock-Broido; The Good Thief by Marie Howe, IV, 672

DALTON, Elizabeth: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 184

DeKOVEN, Marianne: Crossings by Marie Josephine Diamond; Christine/Annette by Albert Guerard; The Object of My Affection by Stephen McCauley, I, 157

DISCHELL, Stuart: Columbus: Chorus & Monologue, (poem), III, 453

ELYTIS, Odysseus: The Almond of the World, (poem), (tr. Jeffrey Carson and Nikos Sarris), I, 125

ESTERHAZY, Peter: On Laziness, (story), II, 247

FAHRLAND, Bridget: What is Past, (poem), III, 452

FANGER, Donald: (br) Moscow 2042 by Vladimir Voinovich, III, 499

FERRY, Luc: The Philosophies of '68, III, 348

FILKINS, Peter: (br) In the Storm of Roses by Ingeborg Bachmann; The Thirtieth Year by Ingeborg Bachmann, II, 320

FONDANE, Benjamin: From: Ulysses, (poem), (tr. Leonard Schwartz and E.M. Cioran), I, 120

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GOLD, Herbert: Selfish Like Me, IV, 632
GOLFFING, Francis: (br) The Book World of Henry James: Appropriating the Classics by Adeline R. Tintner, III, 518
GOODHEART, Eugene: (br) The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays by Ernest Bloch, IV, 662
GRAFF, Gerald: (br) College: The Undergraduate Experience in America. Report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching by Ernst L. Boyer, II, 291
GRAY, Cleve: Seduction and Betrayal in Contemporary Art, III, 357
HADAS, Rachel: (br) Cigarettes by Harry Mathews; The Voyeur by Alberto Moravia; Beloved by Toni Morrison; The Golden Droplet by Michel Tournier, II, 310; On Time, III, 374; Sea, Sky, Mountain, Lantern, (poem), III, 449
HARBISON, Robert: On the Hudson River School, III, 468
HARRINGTON, Michael: An Exchange with Ronald Radosh, I, 76
HARTWIG, Julia: Above Us, (poem),II, 282; What Can They, (poem), II, 283
HAVILAND, Beverly: (br) Break it Down by Lydia Davis; The Progress of Love by Alice Munro; Celebration by Mary Lee Settle, I, 151
HELLERSTEIN, Kathryn: (br) Happy Hour by Alan Shapiro; Sapphics Against Anger and Other Poems by Timothy Steele; The Golden Gate by Vikram Seth, IV,
HERBECK, Ernst: The Sword, (poem), (tr. Melissa Monroe), I, 115
HERBERT, Zbigniew: Landscape, (poem), (tr. Bogdana and John Carpenter), II, 113; The Nepenthe Family, (poem), (tr. Bogdana and John Carpenter), I, 113
HERF, Jeffrey: Phillip Jenninger and the Dangers of Speaking Clearly, II, 225
HIDAS, György: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 180
HOLLANDER, Paul: (br) The Fellow Travellers. Intellectual Friends of Communism. Revised and updated edition by David Caute, IV, 655
HOOK, Sidney: Curricular Politics, II, 201
HOWARD, Richard: Poem Beginning With a Line by Isadora Duncan, (poem), III, 442
IONESCO, Eugene: Theaters of the Absurd, I, 45
ISEMAN, Marjorie: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 190
JACOB, Max: Christ at the

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Movies, (poem), (tr. Rosanna Warren), I, 123
KAPIT, Milton: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 189
KELLY, Wyn: (br) Rope-Dancer by M. J. Fitzgerald; Concertina by M. J. Fitzgerald; Anywhere But Here by Mona Simpson; Second Sight by Mary Tannen, IV,
KIRSCH, Bob: Cezanne's Pursuit, III, 473
KIS, Danilo: Red Stamps with Lenin's Picture, (story), I, 97; The Story of the Master and the Disciple, (story), I, 106
KRYNICKI, Ryszard: Socialist Realism, (poem), II, 287; You're Free, (poem), II, 287; A Stop, (poem), II, 287; Facing the Wall, (poem), II, 288
KURZWEIL,Edith: Psychoanalysis in Vienna, I, 50; Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 179; Hungarian and American Psychoanalysis, II, 193; The Movie Goer, II, 275; (br) Freud: A Life for Our Time by Peter Gay, III, 486; From Wall to Wall, IV, 537; An Interview with T. Kollek, IV, 543
KUSHNER, Aleksandr: Untitled, (poem), (tr. Paul Graves), I, 115; Untitled, (poem), (tr. Paul Graves), I, 116; The Adoration of the Magi, (poem), (tr. Paul Graves), I, 117
LASZLO, Papp: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 186
LEHMAN, David: The Desire for Strange Cities, (poem), III, 451
LELCHUK, Alan: Adventures of a Used-Fiction Boy, (story), IV, 630
LESSING, Doris: On Salman Rushdie: A Communication, III, 406
LEUPOLD-LOWENTHAL, Harald: The Emigration of Freud's Family, I, 57
LEVI, Primo: Reflections on Writing, I, 21
LEVET, Henry J. M.: Outwards, (poem), (tr. Kirby Olson), I, 121; Homewards, (poem), (tr. Kirby Olson), I, 122
LILLA, Mark: "The French Revolution Is Dead," II, 257
LOTTMAN, Herbert: (br) Geniuses Together: American Writers in Paris in the 1920's by Humphrey Carpenter, III, 504
LUST, Ivan: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 185
MAJ, Bronislaw: Untitled, (poem), II, 289; Untitled, (poem), II, 290
McDONALD, Henry: Henry James as Nietzschean: The Dark Side of the Aesthetic, III, 391
MENASHE, Samuel: Awakening, (poem), III, 445; Transplant, (poem), III, 445; Forever

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and a Day, (poem), III, 446
MEYERS, Helen: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 191
MIEDZYRZECKI, Artur: Fate the Clerk Lays Down a New Set of By-laws, (poem), II, 281; The War of Nerves, (poem), II, 282
MOHOCZI, Ildikó: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 188
OLITSKI, Jules: My First New York Show, I, 34
OZ, Amos: Strong Nerves and German Irony, IV, 522; They Were Definitely Created in God's Image, IV, 557
PARINI, Jay: (br) Above the Land by Julie Agoos; The Clasp and Other Poems by Michael Collier; The Squanicook Eclogues by Melissa Green, III, 510
PERETZ, I. L.: In the Mail Wagon, (story), III, 409
PERL, Jed: Seeing Mapplethorpe, IV, 647
PHILLIPS, William: (br) The Immortal Bartfuss by Aharon Appelfeld; The Fifth Child by Doris Lessing, I, 143; Comment, II, 175; Comment, III, 342; Comment, IV, 531; Then and Now: '68 and '89, IV, 534; An Interview with T. Kollek, IV, 543
POLKOWSKI, Jan: "My Sweet Motherland," (poem), II, 288; Hymn, (poem), II, 289
RADOSH, Ronald: An Exchange with Michael Harrington, I, 65; Sunshine at Noon, III, 380
RASKIN, Abe: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 184
REED, Gail S.: (br) The Anatomy of Loving: The Story of Man's Quest to Know What Love Is by Martin S. Bergmann, III, 515
RENAUT, Alain: The Philosophies of '68, III, 348
ROSE, Joanna: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 185
RUDIKOFF, Sonya: (br) The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume I, 1904-1912 Volume II, 1911-1918 edited by Andrew McNeillie, III, 489
SACKS, Peter: Hymn for the New Year, (poem), III, 448
SCHWARTZ, Joan: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 184
SHARANSKY, Natan: Free, I, 7
SIEGEL, Fred: (br) The Radical Renewal: The Politics of Ideas in Modern America by Norman Birnbaum, IV,
SOMMERS, Christina Hoff: (br) Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy Against Domestic Violence from Colonial Times to the Present by Elizabeth Pleck, I, 164

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STERN, Laurent: (br) The Wolf Man's Magic Word by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, I, 161
STRAUS, Dorothea: Petite Plaisance, III, 369
SUTZKEVOR, Abraham: The Kiss, (poem) (tr. Murray Wolfe), I, 114
SZÉKACS, Judith: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 183
SZÖNYI, Gábor: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium) II, 186
SZYMBORSKA, Wistawa: Our Ancestor's Short Lives, (poem), (tr. Stanislaw Baranczak), II, 277; In Broad Daylight, (poem), (tr. Stanislaw Baranczak), II, 278; A Tale Begun, (poem), (tr. Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh), II, 280
TODOROV, Tsvetan: Censorship at the Beaubourg, II, 252; Deflections of the Enlightenment, IV, 581
VIKAR, György: Hungary After Glasnost, (Symposium), II, 186
WATSON, George: (br) The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age by Simon Schama, III, 507
WIEDER, Laurance: (br) Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible edited by David Rosenberg, II, 325
WELISH, Marjorie: (br) Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volumes 1 and 2 edited by John O' Brian, II, 301
WILKIN, Karen: At the Galleries, I, 133; At the Galleries, II, 266; At the Galleries, III, 458
WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: Fascist Nations, (poem), II, 283; Indictment, (poem), II, 285; The Padlock Speaks, (poem), II, 286
YURKIEVICH, Saul: Off to Nevernever Land, (poem), (tr. Cola Franzen), I, 118
ZASLAVSKY, Victor: (br) Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present by Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich, I, 147

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